

Captivity, Emancipation and beyond: Time and Society – a Comparative Study of Satyajit Ray's Women

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Abstract

Women, the mystic- the exotic and the nurturer, are a reservoir of binaries. Female psyche possesses such fascinating opposites that might either demean or out rightly subjugate them in one hand; simultaneously, on the other hand, at times, the docile femininity itself might reverberate with extraordinary promises to establish a meek- submissive woman in budding magnificent 'New Woman'. The struggle of women in an austere gendered society is beyond the boundaries of spatio-temporal particularities. The prolonged incarceration of their spirit results in a crushed and crumbled locus of identity, totally exterior and alien to the women themselves. Within a high 'phallogocentric' ambience the feminine eccentricities are stoned and denied to breathe and germinate. While the periodic time gradually moves forward, the general outlook towards women moderated scarcely. In spite of that, the 'second sex', largely succumbed to the overpowering presence of their male counterparts, or society per se, rejuvenates with new hopes to overturn the age old speculations and customs which chain them down. Satyajit Ray, the iconoclast who was responsible for the revolutions in the field of cinema, portrays these dualities of women subtly and marvellously in two of his classics, *Devi* and *Mahanagar*. During the high tide of European New Wave films in the late 1950s and 1960s, it was Satyajit Ray who gave voice to the widely acclaimed Bengali Parallel Cinema to render it not only to the level of visual art, but to expand the meaning of cinema from aesthetic pleasure to a socio-political-cultural text in itself. Being a neorealist himself, Ray was concerned with the actual existing realities behind every apparent celebration of ritualistic and customary codes. In this paper, I would like to merge the reel with the real as both of them are indivisibly complementary to each other. Visual arts are often termed as the inseparable tools to represent the social construct and its nuances so visibly that the audience are jolted, trembled and somewhat silenced with the feats of sudden epiphany. In the visual arts, thereby, often rest the seed of the gestation of a self realization and courage to moderate and bring revolution within the inner world. The director's eyes act as a prime lens to bring into a closer scrutiny the simple yet much intrinsic realities surrounding the women. To add to this, Ray frames these two fictive women so convincingly and realistically that any common household lady can relate her journey with them. I would like to extend further later on, how the two female protagonists from two different time structures as presented in these two films, become mouthpieces of both captivity as well as emancipation; subtly indicating on the other hand as to how women might use, produce and channelize the 'shakti' that resides deep within. So, my paper would focus on Ray's women who on the contrary at some point seize to be only Ray's women and become universal 'Phenomenal Women' with all their duties, virtues, vices, idiosyncrasies, faults, mistakes, courage, affection, devotion and dedication.

Keywords

struggle, deification, scepticism, transformation, protest

I

‘The eye, which is said to be the window of the soul, is the primary means by which the brain may most fully and magnificently contemplate the infinite works of nature . . .’, said *Leonardo da Vinci*. True to Vinci’s contention, the pioneer of Indian movies, the man who altered and redefined the description of cinema and rendered it to international recognition, Satyajit Ray undoubtedly possessed the inner eye. An outstandingly versatile man himself, Ray’s personal pursuit of being a director was highly moved and stimulated by Western classic cult movies, for example, Vittorio De Sica’s Italian Neorealist 1948 film *Bicycle Thieves (Ladri di Bicilette)*; mostly during his visit in Europe:

Of the exactly ninety-nine films that Satyajit saw while he was in Europe, including *La Règle du Jeu* which he rated one of the best films ever made, the revelation was unquestionably De Sica’s *Bicycle Thieves*. It ‘gored’ him. ‘I came out of the theatre my mind fully made up. I would become a film-maker’, he said in his 1982 lecture ... ‘The prospect of giving up a safe job didn’t daunt me anymore. I would make my film exactly as De Sica had made his: working with non-professional actors, using modest resources, and shooting on actual locations.’ (Robinson 72).

Satyajit detested the blind artificial worship of technical polish marked by lack of genuine inspiration and he always pronounced that Indian film-makers should consider real life incidents- milieus and perspectives to capture in camera.

The impact Jean Renoir and Henry Cartier-Bresson left on him with independent film making and candid photography nevertheless helped in bringing out the true artistic awareness of Ray as well as the particularities he used to apply in both the arena of cinematographic sharpness and in his very unique way of storytelling. Just as Akira Kurosawa, in his Epoch-making and internationally acclaimed film, *Rashoman*, has presented the expression of a distinctive indigenous culture conveying both the violence of Japanese history and the restrained characteristic of Classical Japanese art; Ray, similarly has pronounced his ‘Indianness’ as an artist with strong, intense and simple theme. Indian aesthetics and traditions lead Ray to probe deep into the socio-cultural-political background of both his contemporary time period as well as to that of a distant past through the device of cinema. The deployment of his women characters in this context become predominantly instrumental for presenting the microcosm of social panorama. The portrayal of the

fundamental aspects of life was primarily designed by Ray through the female characters. The director's analytical critiquing of the indigenous Hindu culture, idiosyncrasies and nuances of religiosity and cultural stereotypes of a traditional orthodox Indian society through the perspectives of the women characters strike his audiences immediately.

The two films that I would like to take in discussion in this paper to elaborate this context further are *Devi* and *Mahanagar*. Ray adapted the stories from two great Bengali writers, Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay and Narendranath Mitra. But as Satyajit writes, "All great film-makers have fashioned classics out of other people's stories. ... He may borrow his material, but he must colour it with his own experience of the medium ..." ("Should A Film-Maker Be Original" 13) soon they acclaimed the high water-mark of all-time classics. Nevertheless, in this paper, I propose to analyse the two central female characters of the films taken into discussion, through the two distinctly bi-polar time and space scenarios to denote how women's struggle for existence in a largely gendered social structure gradually moderate, reshape and alter with the passage of time.

II

"Despite being set in the 1860s, *Devi* or *The Goddess*, which Ray made in 1959-60, is a film with strong resonances in today's India, and even further afield, wherever religious fanaticism exists. It is Ray's most 'Hindu' film..." (Robinson 120). *Devi* presents before the audience a picture of Bengal when the confrontation of Hindu orthodoxy and rational reformism were excruciatingly preparing the grounds for the gradually approaching Women Liberation Movement in India. *Devi* embodies through its characters the conflict between the acceptance of orthodox Hindu superstitions and the growth of scepticism and revolt. Its pivot is a religious belief with ancient roots: the notion that a woman can become an incarnation of a Mother Goddess. The film conveys the saga of Dayamayi, a young and defenceless village bride, living in a rich orthodox zamindari household, being worshipped as Mother Kali. Her father-in-law Kalikinkar Roy, an ageing pious *zamindar*¹ is responsible for perceiving Dayamayi's divine status; he has a compelling vision one night, and falls at her feet. During

¹*Zamindari* or the Landed gentry was a historical and extremely influential territory of administration in pre- British and British India. Primarily designated as the landowners and revenue collectors, the *Zamindars* used to dominate most of the rural India.

the absence of her husband Umapasrad, Roy's younger son, the entire village grandiloquently celebrates the sudden incarnation of the 'Ma'- the 'divine'-the 'deity' and there begins Dayamayi's tryst of perceiving her true self out of her constant struggle with the dual identity. The ultimate interweaving of the Goddess and an ordinary earthly woman brings a fatal end in Dayamayi's life leaving her mind and body only as a devastated caricature of the divine insanity.

The doubts posited by the western critics of Ray, are almost near a complete misreading of the character of both Umapasrad and his wife. There are perhaps two outstanding misconceptions among non-Indians critics that seriously hinder appreciation of the film. The first is the idea of a male God integral to western religious thinking, while in India primarily the female nature or the feminine aspects of God is celebrated and worshiped. The women of India are conceived as a meditated body of a consciousness or an ideal – their simple faith in the sanctity of devotion is equated with divinity and saintliness of love. She who is gifted with it is called *Devi* - the Divine Mother. The second misconception is that the Mother is only a source of creation. But, as Indian myths suggest, the Mother Goddess herself is the force of destruction as well. In the image of Goddess Kali therefore, the ideas of both annihilation and cultivation is manifested. She has four arms, wears a girdle of severed arms and a necklace of skulls with her tongue sticking out to lick up blood. In her two left hands she holds a decapitated head and bloody sword, while her two right hands confer blessings on her devotees and make a gesture similar to that seen in statues of the Buddha, signifying '*Barabhaya*', 'be without fear'. So Kali is shown as the Mother and the Destroyer, giver of life and death, blessings and misfortunes, pleasures and pains. However, what Ray wants to emphasize is that the paradigm of this Hindu concept of divinity as a feminine figure commemorating both the creation and destruction, has been forcefully imposed to Dayamayi. Behind the apparent celebration of motherly powers, the human instincts and sensibility is completely jeopardized. Equating Dayamayi, an earthly woman with equally earthly attributes with the divine figures of Durga or Kali, conceived as the slayer of demonic evil consequently eradicated the lively and mundane self of Daya. By a series of suggestive glimpses of Dayamayi's routine as a young daughter-in-law in a wealthy orthodox Hindu household, Ray builds up a feeling for the many admirable qualities in her that are gradually succumbed with some naive persuasions of her father-in-law's vision.

The little yet minute sequence that shows her preparing various accoutrements of worship while the patriarch approaches, is one of the finest in the film. The percussive sound of her father-in-law's wooden sandals, slowly making the way down the stairs to perform his puja, a mind filled with the reverential yearnings, thickens the emotional atmosphere as well as creates the ground for the deification of Dayamayi (Vide.Fig:1) . Kalikinkar, wrapped in a beautiful old shawl, wearing on his shoulder the appropriate inscribed ritual garment, toddles forth and collapsed in front of the shrouded figure of Dayamayi at the shrine, and then utters the single syllable that is both a blessing and a curse: 'Ma!' It is the conventional mode of address for both goddess and human – Kali and Dayamayi; to Roy they are both Mother, and as the film progresses, they are less and less to be distinguished in his fevered mind. The visualization of Kalikinkar's feverish vision therefore, becomes extensively symbolic as it portrays Daya's initial hesitation but ultimate and gradual internalization of the imposed divinity

From here on begins Dayamayi's journey towards her impending doom. Jolted initially by the sudden thrust of divinity, Daya shows some gestures of revolt, her nails scratch on the wall beside her door and her toes curl away in revulsion. Her implications are clear in bringing out that she is just a human being and possessed by no spirit of a goddess. Yet to resist the fanatic impacts of her father-in-law is beyond her control. As, no one in the household openly questions the old zaminder, he enshrines Daya as a *devi* with his priests obediently conducting the process of worship. Although Dayamayi has ample awareness of the appalling predicament of her father-in-law forced upon her, she is too bound to her tradition, to assert a will of self preservation and escape the hypnotising, bewildering and baffling effect of being worshipped. "*Devi* vividly depicts the reason for struggle against orthodoxy in nineteenth century Bengal" (Seton 128). Confused, devastated and churned up by the conflicting emotions within her, Daya pathetically submits herself to the worship as she has lack of power to halt it. Somewhere down her trembled psyche, the dominating presence of the patriarchy has infused a conflict of conjecture which drags her, later on, to conceive herself as a reincarnation of Kali or Durga possessing magical and miraculous powers to slay evil forces. It's undeniable that she stands in midst of a psychological crisis that torments her to the core, but as Ray sets his story in the backdrop of a social structure that denies it's women to practise their basic voice for freedom and justice, Dayamayi towards the end chokes to death. Unhurriedly, with a compassionate yet coolly impersonal

restraint, Ray unfolds, in shots of compelling beauty the inevitable doom that becomes Daya's fate. Harisundari, the sceptical sister-in-law of Daya, observes the process of deification with growing disbelief and tries to aware Daya, as we see, from shot to shot, to hold on her human senses. It is she who acts a little rational in spite of the suffocating spell of miracles and writes to Umaprasad to come back immediately to take care of the matter. The stage is set for a confrontation between father and son, between opposing philosophies. While an ailed child of a local villager has been duly cured and revived by pouring ceremonial liquid into his mouth, Umaprasad, being an extremely rational man, almost like a spokesperson of the reformist movement in nineteenth century Bengal, observes the entire incident only to remain unconvinced. He tries hard to extricate Daya from the alleged performance of miracle, the *solka*-chanting priests, the crowds of worshippers and the web of claustrophobic fantasy and isolation woven around her. He almost manages momentarily to drag Daya out of her trance-like state by persuading her to leave the house, shake out the facade of divinity and be his wife, one again. But Daya, is so engrossed with her divine self, that while walking down to the river with Umaprasad, she suddenly abandons the company of her husband and accepts as well as succumbs to her obsession with *shakti*. Daya, by rejecting one last chance to return to a normal life, sinks into yet deeper entranced state:

DAYAMAYI: What if I'm the Goddess?

UMAPRASAD: Have you, too, gone mad, Daya?

DAYAMAYI: That boy was cured. He opened his eyes. (*Devi*)

Her enthronement shrouds her in inert oppressive isolation even more as larger crowds of worshippers come to take *darshan* of her. The climax of the captivity of her own identity reveals with the child Prodyumna's reaction to her. He is alienated from her and no longer comes near her, but one day his ball accidentally bounces across her threshold and into her room. The frightened child peeps in, hastily enters into the room to rescue his ball and runs away. Recollection of the memories of past with her husband comes to a faint, reawakened Daya, but again, despite the tears and an urgency to get back to normalcy, all her attempts prove to be futile. A paralysing submission to mass worship has wrenched her and with the death of the little boy of Taraprasad and Harisundari, Dayamayi's fictive world of divinity falls into pieces. Dayamayi, who was almost at the verge of her destruction, now completely loses her sanity and stability. Sitting stoned, with the dead child in her lap, she becomes constantly aware at the gradual awakening of her consciousness that she possess no

magical power, that she is as impotent and as sterile as the mute and silent effigy of the goddess herself. Both the human and the mistaken divine image are now disintegrated into macabre and horrific.

The mastery of Ray, as a director in bringing out the inexplicable immanent plight of a young bride turned into a goddess, integrates in his artful handling of the camera work and careful use of classical music as well, avoiding any exaggerations that would make it uncanny and bizarre. “Instead of heightening the drama, the camera was employed to contemplate approaching tragedy with accumulating solemnity” (Seton 131). The weaving of the malicious-oppressive-ritualistic presence of religious interventions becomes more telling when towards the end when Umapasrad questions the authenticity of the patriarchal nature of religion when he came to know that the child is dead:

UMAPRASAD: You have killed Khoka, Father. You took his life.

KALIKINKAR: Uma!!!

UMAPRASAD: Did you get him treated by a Doctor?

KALIKINKAR: Treatment? I handed him over to the Mother herself, at her mercy, at her holy feet.

UMAPRASAD: You're the one who has killed him. Your superstition is the reason. (*Devi*)

The most touching as well as high climactic part of the movie is, however, the last scene where the ‘Goddess’ has been transfigured into a pathetic ‘Demoness’ and vanished mysteriously across the field next to their house. The scene leaves a long enchanting impact on the audience when they parallel the lost quasi-divine figure with that of a slowly submerging effigy of Durga during the eve of *Dashami*. The smudged kohl, the unseeing eyes, the tangled and unruly hair open wide on the back of Dayamayi, aptly contributes in the intensification of the scene (Vide.Fig:2).

The exquisite promotional poster-work of *Devi*, having a half goddess – half human face is also tuned with symbolic overtones (Vide.Fig:3). Satyajit gives eloquent expression to his doubts about the existence of such a religion which on the one hand worships the female power as an elemental energy or benign divinity and on the other offers that very feminine power as a sacrifice to their custom. Dayamayi becomes instrumental in exposing the blinding traditional superstitions and age old irrationalism that is hard to outgrow. Dayamayi,

the sceptical creation of Ray, questions and teaches women from different ages not to succumb into the darkness of rational bondage. The unfinished clay idol of the goddess, waiting to be dressed and decorated towards the fag end of the movie, also seems to silently reiterate that it is humans who create and recreate divinity, whether that would be beneficiary for them or be agent of destruction, entirely belongs to their own choice. It may also suggest that the female body, here disguised as the naked clay idol of a goddess is always under the continuous scrutiny of the patriarchal gaze.

III

“Not for a moment did I feel that I was acting. The character was so real. I seemed to know her. She was like someone I had seen,” said Madhabi Mukherjee of her wonderfully expressive performance as Arati in *Mahanagar*, which Ray shot in the first half of 1963.” (Robinson 149). *Mahanagar*, the next film that I propose to discuss in this paper, stands in vivid contrast with the previous one. While *Devi* constructs a woman like the helpless-meek-submissive Dayamayi who submits herself to the overshadowing presence of society and religion; Arati, from *Mahanagar*, being a rebel and a struggler emerges out as emblematic of one woman’s quest for freedom. The film has been adopted from a short story called *Abataranika* by Narendranath mitra. *Abataranika* – this Bengali word suggests that someone, a woman to be specific, has stepped down from a certain standard decorum. *Devi* presents Ray’s critique of an opposition between orthodoxy and liberalism, between irrational superstitions and rational reasoning; similarly *Mahanagar* too, is a critique of clashing world views, setting the prejudices of the older generation against the reformative younger generation. Nevertheless, the nucleus of the story is again the life of a woman standing in the midst of the tremors of struggle and seeking a change within her as well as a transformation in the social and familial values. Although *Mahanagar* captures a very contemporary society, presumably a society in its process of modernisation and westernisation, but underneath that superficial reality lays a prolonged preservation of a set of codes, conducts, behavioural patterns, values of ancestral past designed by patriarchy:

Large numbers of middle-class women are now working, and the joint family, as depicted in *Mahanagar*, has become the exception rather than the rule. Widespread resistance to respectable women taking jobs other than in teaching (which they had been doing since the early years of the century), is a thing of the past... the real

tension within Arati is a perennial one: not whether she should take a job, but whether she should try to please everyone – husband, child and in-laws. For the Indian woman the conflict can be particularly acute, because those close to her expect more than is expected of women in the West. (Robinson 150)

The film begins with Subrata Mazumder, a young bank clerk on his way back to his cramped home. Soon the scene shifts to his wife Arati, a traditional docile woman from a middle-class Bengali household, a dutiful wife, an attending daughter-in-law, a caring mother and a friendly sister-in-law (Vide.Fig:4). The locus of Arati's identity is shown to be limited only within the boundaries of four walls, maintaining all these qualities of a 'perfect' housewife. Unconscious of her plights and oblivious of her own unpronounced talents getting wasted in the name of a false standard of behaviour, Arati submits herself to the rigid constructions of society initially and thereby, along with her family members she too accepts the hypocrisy. The transformation of Arati, into a 'New Woman' begins with her decision to assist her husband financially by getting a job. For a woman belonging from a largely conservative disposition, breaking the tradition is not an acceptable step. Arati was initially shaky, a bit hesitant and doubtful about her academic qualification, but finally manages to proceed out of her specified zone. What was meant to be only assisting her husband towards the beginning turns into Arati's quest for freedom. The job as a salesgirl of a new knitting machine company not only becomes a source for extra income for the family but at the same time makes way for the showers of potentials that rejuvenate the otherwise barren and sterile routine bounded life of Arati. On her first day Arati is seen to have food together with her husband which again is not a practised culture of a middle class orthodox traditional Bengali household, the sister-in-law is seen excited whereas the mother-in-law sheds tears at this 'grave sin'. Her father-in-law, Priyogopal an ex-school teacher, a man of deceitful pride refuses to bless Arati for this 'unpardonable offence' and 'humiliation'. Yet Arati, a lady guided by the customs of her culture, a typical Bengali wife with a veil in her head, an image of a presiding deity of the inner world - a performer of sanctity, chooses to lift her veil to come out of the clutches of patriarchy. As the movie proceeds, Ray unfolds the layers of Arati's transformation like a budding flower. The routine life of Arati, nursing and taking care of her family, gradually transcends to a self-consciousness of her innate abilities when her boss, a jowly, somewhat patronising Bengali called Mukherjee congratulates her. Arati becomes more confident when she receives her first salary. There are four other girls too, three of whom are giggly, fashion-conscious Bengalis, and the fourth is an Anglo-Indian

called Edith who speaks mainly English to Arati but also understands Bengali. She is forthright, even a little brash, in a way that Arati could never be, but they become friends. Mukherjee, on the other hand, dislikes Edith and makes this plain; he is decidedly prejudiced against the offspring of ‘our ex-rulers’. Edith’s impression on Arati is huge. A homely Bengali who was not exposed to western cultural atmosphere, is now adopting a few of them which once again is an assertion of her subconscious cravings for freedom. At the washroom after getting paid and exchanging her ‘bad and smelly’ notes with Arati’s new ones, Edith teaches her to wear a lipstick. A lipstick, in a strictly orthodox patriarchal Bengali household is considered as an adaptation from western nuances and certainly an unacceptable gesture (Vide.Fig:5). Through Edith’s simple question, “what’s wrong with using a little lipstick? You put red here (gesturing to her forehead), red here (gesturing to the parting of her hair suggesting vermilion), why not here (gesturing to her lips)?” Ray criticizes the notions of the old age school that anything western is subject to immorality. Later in the movie, Arati is also gifted a sunglass by Edith when she visits her place to give her the salary and collect the sales report. Arati hesitates again, initially then accepts it, smiles slyly and wears it. Arati transgresses her boundaries and accepts new experiences, cautiously though. As Arati settles in and begins to earn a commission too, the atmosphere at home changes. Her decision to take a job had already provoked a ‘cold war’, as Subrata terms it, between her husband and his retired father. However, later in the movie her husband is amused and startled seeing her bringing gifts, learning new vocabularies like ‘commission’ and the absolutely uninhibited confidence she has acquired. Subrata, is also equally surprised at Arati’s free, unrestrained and informal addressing of her boss by his name ‘Himangshu Babu’, instead of a more formal addressing, ‘Mr. Mukherjee’. After a few tense scenes between them he bluntly asks her to resign; convincing her that he will take a part-time work on top of his regular job which would be enough to tend their living. Arati stays aback at this sudden announcement. She is not yet ready to accept the harsh decision of her husband, being imposed on her.

ARATI: I was getting on so well with my work- is that what you didn’t like?

SUBRATA: You know what this work is doing to you? You are losing weight, getting lines under your eyes.

ARATI: But I don’t feel tired. I’ve been working all day and I feel all right. Do you really want me to give up my job?

SUBRATA: Not just me. Father, Mother and him. (Pointing towards their son Pintu)
You don’t want all these people miserable. (*Mahanagar*)

Yet, Arati agrees, for her family's sake, in spite of all her conflicting turmoil. Fortunately, for both of them she cannot quit immediately, as she sits in front of her boss and prepares herself to proceed, his phone rings and it is Subrata on the other side. He has just lost his job at the bank after a financial crash, and tells her desperately not to hand the letter over. This is an insightful instance of the motif of the naked hypocrisy of a largely gendered society that resonates throughout the movie. Soon Arati's job becomes their only hope. As the sole bread earner, she turns much more responsible towards her duties, while at home her husband sinks into gloom. He becomes overtly conscious of his unemployment, at his masculine pride and at his egoistic identity with the success of his wife, which on the other hand results in a feat of jealousy and a subtle tone of rivalry. Physically they rub shoulders, but the wavelength between them has been washed ashore. He starts taking minute note of every single word and every single action of Arati which consequently intensifies his gestures of inferiority and an unspoken wrath. When Arati informs Subrata, sitting alone with him amidst the darkness of the room, about her salary hike, his sense of strong aversion echoes in the room: "It's the golden era of the wives, and the bad time for the husbands." Things become worse when Subrata accidentally catches a glimpse of Arati having tea with some other man and later on sees Mukherjee, the boss, dropping Arati home. Arati again breaks a stereo-typical traditional notion of 'Purdah' where a woman, in spite of being educated, is considered only as an object bound to remain within the inner world of 'Ghar' and maintain her sanctity and purity. Any exposure to the outer world of 'Bahir' is unthinkable, unwanted and restricted. Yet, Arati decides to transgress her limits, in a way, imposed on her. However, the animosities between these two sexes finally come to a head when Arati comes to know that Edith has been sacked on an irrelevant ground of immoral purposes and loose living. Arati, who achieves at this point of her life a higher niche of liberation by transcending from her struggle for livelihood to an elevated ideology of solidarity as a woman, defies her economical needs or her aspirations for a better career only by deciding to confront Mukherjee in order to stand beside Edith. Baffled and even somewhat hurt, her boss tries to explain that he did it for Arati's benefit – so that she could be put in charge of the sales-force. Therefore, fighting and standing up for an Anglo-Indian would be highly juvenile as well as unethical. But Arati is resolute; without losing her temper for a moment, a determined gleam has entered her eye. Mukherjee warns her she is putting her own job at risk but she persists. Suddenly, on an impulse, she produces the old resignation letter from her bag, drops it on his desk and coolly walks out, followed by Mukherjee's startled cry 'Mrs Mazumdar!' On the way out, rushing

down the stairs, Arati's anger begins to evaporate, giving way to panic and tension. And as she happens to meet Subrata, who was on his way to visit Mukherjee, she falters. Eventually words come bursting out of her, in the desperate hope that he, at least, will understand the reasons behind the resignation. After an initial shock and all hard endeavours, they resist their relationship from segregate any further, they, together revive it. Then, slowly, wonderingly, she looks up at the tall buildings that surround their private world of anguish. 'What a big city! Full of jobs,' she says softly. 'There must be something somewhere for one of us.' And on that note of cautious optimism the couple walk off into the early-evening office crowd around Dalhousie Square and become indistinguishable, as a more serene, mature version. However, although, Narendranath Mitra ended his version of the story in a pessimistic note, Ray moderates. He chooses to conclude the movie in a bright optimistic note instead of following Mitra. Whereas the resignation gives a sheer gloomy touch in the atmosphere of their conjugal relationship in the story, in the movie the same motif of resignation rejuvenates the relationship strongly. Ray, by shifting the perspective, hints that all is not lost for Arati, in the humdrums of the big city. Amidst the entire struggle, Arati does come out as a symbol of pulsating hope. As she regains the assistance of her husband, the cycle of her transformation completes. The promotional poster of *Mahanagar*, in this context, effectively portrays the picture of an independent and radiant Arati, ready to accept the difficulties and challenges of life in a busy city more confidently (Vide. Fig: 6).

While Ray has depicted several other influential female characters like Sarbajaya, Durga or Aparna in *Apu Trilogy*, Charulata in *Charulata*, Bimala in *Ghare Baire*, Ratan in *Post Master*, Mrinmayi in *Samapti*, the selection of Dayamayi and Arati over all these characters is worth an explanation. They are probably the most fitting characters to strike a binary and opposition to represent the struggle of women since time immemorial to transcend the gaze of patriarchal bondage in order to attain an identity of their own. The two stories itself possibly, also hints at the fact that whereas a woman can be submissive enough to sink deep into the bondage of patriarchy and crumble herself with the burden of impositions; it is again a woman, who acts simultaneously as a reservoir of hidden efficacies and an acting rebel, a harbinger of change diminishing all the blinding prejudices. A close comparative scrutiny of Dayamayi and Arati, thereby, inscribes the saga of the gradual evolution of women, from a silent sufferer to a symbol of protest craving for equalities and freedom.

Annexure



Fig.1: Sharmila Tagore as a deified Dayamayi.



Fig.3: The Poster of *Devi*.



Fig.2: Sharmila Tagore as Dayamayi and Soumitra Chatterjee as Umadas in the confrontation scene. The appropriate appearance of Tagore makes the climax breath taking.



Fig.4: Madhabi Mukherjee as Arati, Anil Chatterjee as Subrata, Jaya Bhaduri as Bani. The scene perfectly depicts Arati as an anchor holding the centre of the joint family.



Fig.5: Arati (Madhabi Mukherjee) befriends Edith (Vicky Redwood) in a significant scene that talks about the needs of women empowerment and change in orthodox prejudices.



Fig.6: These two illustrations of the promotional posters are supportive of the entire idea of one woman's journey towards self-fulfilment in a Metropolis.

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