



Research Paper

## Modernity And Gender Mobility in Satyajit Ray Films: A Study of Mahanagar (1964)

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**ABSTRACT:** The arrival of Satyajit Ray films in the history of Bengali Cinema has created new narrative and cinematic expressions on different themes. However the early films of Ray, which are exclusively related to the themes of *unsung, unnoticed, unemployed lives of the marginal's and the rural poor's of the Bengal*. Whereas in his later films we could see that portrays of urban middle class Bengalis lives, their economic condition and their entry into the modern world. As Ray depicts in his later films, Bengal was facing a new economic pressure in post independence India and this had much affected on Bengal's middle class communities in Kolkata. The resulting of this condition, the middle and lower middle class families were struggling to lead a comfortable life in the big city. And also to fulfil their financial needs in the family, both men and women were necessary to work outside the family. This inevitable situation was accept by both the modern and orthodox families, in where ordinary house wives were also begin to work in public market place. When they enter into the public sphere, their life style and their gender roles have been changed lot and it would become a progressive sign of modernity in Bengal's middle class women's lives.

In this sense, the present study try to analyses the one such film of Satyajit Ray- Mahanagar (The Big City-1964), in which Ray has insightfully projected the modernity and gender mobility through his female protagonist of Arati's life. The film has depicts the metamorphosed life of ordinary housewife in private and public sphere, once she stepping into the modern world. In the film Ray has projected this individual woman's life as progressive modern identity and also her changing gender roles in the family is a sign of new modern woman.

The present study begins with the argument that, how this Arati's large move towards modernity is questioned by patriarchal norms and how they felt that this positive development in housewife's life is insecure to the conservative values. And the paper is mainly focuses on that the question of modernity in woman's life is suspected by her husband and her in laws in the family. Finally the paper concludes with how Arati's dual gender roles are not recognised by husband and in laws in familial relationship.

**Keywords:** Dual gender role, Modernity, Progressive identity, Patriarchal value system, Social mobility.

### I. INTRODUCTION

In the period of 1960s, Ray has made a series of internationally-acclaimed films i.e. Devi (The Goddess-1960), Kapurush (The Cowrad-1965), Mahanagr (The Big City-1963), and Charulatha (1964), which are centred on female protagonists in different social, cultural and historical context in Bengal. In Devi, Ray represent woman as a Goddess image and made a critique of Bengali orthodoxy in the nineteenth century. While in Mahanagar, Charulata and Kapurash, all featuring actress Madhabi Mukherjee as the central protagonist, he explored the theme of women's emancipation in changing modern society. Late nineteenth century liberal, upper class Bengali woman in the case of Charulata, modern day middle class woman with Kapuarsh, and the immigrant lower class woman from East Bengal in Mahanagar.

As Suranjan Ganguly, argues that; in these films of Satyajit Ray, could be seen as espousing an idealistic endorsement of Nehru's vision of nation building, an idealism which crumbled after Nehru's death in 1964. In this sense, it is possible to read ray's depiction of women's struggle for emancipation in as an important component of the general move towards a Nehruvian vision of a progressive modern India. Ray's exploration of the relationship between women's emancipation and changing conditions is can be seen as a symbol of modernity and gender mobility in the film Mahanagar which is nowhere subtle than this film.

As we can see, Mahanagar has sheds light on the dual gender roles of Arati, (Madhabi Mukherjee), who she taking care of her family and also she works outside the family to fulfil financial requirements. In the film, at beginning Arati is seems to be like any ordinary housewife, but later by her husband's suggestion she takes up a job as salesperson in private company to support her large family. This certain situation in the film has proves that how Arati has leads a dual gender roles in newly economic pressures in contemporary Bengal, in the period post Independence India. Though the film has gives the details of Arati's every day household works in which she is used to take care of her son, sister in law, mother in law and father in law. But this dual gender role of woman in the family did not recognised by her husband as well as her in laws and they had think that it is only wives responsibilities in the so called patriarchal value system.

Although, Arati has faced this patriarchal barrier, but still she has successful at her job and with short period of time she gains lot of appreciation from her boss Himangsu Mukherjee, about her working proficiency. In film Arati's active involvement in work and close association with her Anglo-Indian colleague and dear friend Edith Simmons is recognisable. At this point we can see that Ray's Mahanagar presents a more optimistic view of the individual's ability to harness and chanelised social chnage. The fact that Ray chooses the character of a woman to fore ground this optimistic vision adds a peculiar edge to the issue surrounding gender in the films of social and historical context. But this new development in Arati's life style has leads to space for suspicion in her husband's mind and father in law's mind so they start to question about these new changes. Their only anxiety is this new change in woman's life may disrespect to the very root of familial values. The conflict arises in the family proves that how the woman's modern identity is suspected and how it affects on her progressive modern way life. At the same time husband's suspicion about wife's job proves that how the woman's dual gender role in the family is always suspects and questioning by patriarchal value system.

Here, Ray locates the struggle of Arati, a woman trying to balance her different roles within and outside the household, as an essentially lonely one. Ray makes the clash between the older generation and the new run throughout the film narrative and he problematises other binaries such as those between modernity and openness to western ideas on the one hand, and conservatism and an entrenched traditionalism on the other hand

After all this development Subrato (Arati's husband), thinks that he must advise her to quit the job but things takes worse, because his bank shuts down and leaving him jobless. So, now Arati is the only breadwinner of the family and she is necessity to continue her job. Understating this situation Arati is actively involved in her work and she has cordial relationship with her boss (Himanshu Mukherjee), who genuinely sympathetic towards lower middle- class families. He has appreciated lot about Arati's work and he used to drop her to home. Arati has completely success in her outside work and earning enough money for the family surveillance in the modern world. But this has leads to inferiority complex in her husband's (Subrato) mind and his frustration makes him go and talk with her boss once. The film in fact, shows that the middle class woman's liberation in post partition Bengal stems from deteriorating economic conditions, which results in the need for men to exploit her both at home and in the workplace. Such a change, taking place in a society that is otherwise deeply rooted in patriarchal mores, makes the struggle for the woman like Arati all the more difficult, for the very people who make her leave home for work also deeply resent her for doing so.

On the other side Arati's father in law and mother in law are also hesitate to ask money from her, because they displeasure about their daughter in laws enter into job market and work in public sphere. Here we must understand that men and women are capable to work in both places like home and society but they are not ready to accept the woman's dual gender role. In society so called patriarchal value system always assume that woman's changing gender role is not more important than man's gender role. In the film, we have another example on this point, when Arati gets her pay in every month, she feels proud on that and this proudest which comes from her salary/money, gains lot of happiness about her role in the family. But this happiness is subjected by patriarchal authority and familial rules, because after getting her salary when she comes to home, she must give it her husband. Though, Arati is the only breadwinner in the family and this great honour and pleasure which comes from inner mind but it doesn't have space to enjoy it. The reason is that the practices of male dominate societal prejudice are stop woman from enjoying her changing gender roles.

With all these troubled situations, Arati is continues to work with lot of enthusiasm but at the same time Subrato is submerged by doubts and fears and where Arati has feels the feminine impulse to protect her unemployed husband. One scene which shows that when Arati meeting a clients husband in town, she enters a cafe with him, and lies to him about Subrato, telling him that he is employed full time, that he is set up a business of his own. This being a movie, there is a coincidence; Subrato is present in the cafe and overhears her, lying about him. And just before that, he had seen her wearing sunglasses in the streets, and something traditional wives never do. Despite Arati earns the money which gives her social recognition in the society, but she has no space to enjoy it. But if man (husbsnd) has established themselves as money- earners, it is naturally to enjoy his domineering position. But what happens when gender roles are overturned? If a woman starts to working and earning money, obviously the recognition and worth goes to her. But this positive social

recognition of woman could not digest by man. When woman no longer remains in the same dependency on men it is obviously a sign of complete freedom in her life.

The film comes to final part of narration which turns with unexpected situation in Arati's office and where she has bitter arguments with her boss Himanshu Mukherjee. In the office Mukharjee had dismisses Arati's Anglo-Indian friend Edith Simmons with miss-interpreted promiscuity on her work. This was purely racial prejudice in where boss has wrongly accusing about Edith's commitment in the work. Intolerable Arati does not bear with this false balming and she has argues with her boss about the injustice of Edith.

So here, Arati resigns in protest; this proves that Arati is completely turns into be new modern woman image, because she has guts to fight for the injustice and questions about male domination in public sphere. Finally the film ends with emotional note, where Arati is crying after coming out from her office and there her husband Subrato is stood up and she tells him that he must have understand her properly in all the time. At last Subarto understand his wife Arati's bold decision and they return to their home with new hope of life to face the further economic pressure. In Mahangar, Ray suggests that if women's modernisation was fuelled by economic imperatives rather than by a more deep-seated rejection of patriarchal ways of thinking, how this movement could sustain itself when there was neither support for women at home, nor was there much hope for overall economic betterment overtime. It is Arati who changes the most in the course of the film. It is so much that becoming a working woman makes her independent or liberated financial welfare of her family still remains the focus of her life and the theme of modern transition is a major concern as for as Arati is concerned. Rather, it results in the growth of her personality in ways that would have been impossible is she were confined to being a housewife: indeed, Arati makes the best of the changes in her life and gender roles both in personal and social terms.

On the other hand, Arati's increasing awareness of modern, class and gender roles where she found her freedom and rights as woman. This had results in the climatic confrontation with her boos, Mr. Mukherjee. Mr. Mukherjee's condemnation and dismissal of Edith is an injustice on several levels. Arati is, of course, aware that the bonds of class and gender are stronger than the ostensible fissures of race and religion.

Finally we seen say that, Mahanagar is such a nuanced representation of modern society with a focus on individuals, rather than an overtly class or familial issues, Ray has represented progressive modern woman. In fact, the refusal to sublimate in this fashion Arati's story endows greater agency to her as a woman, while keeping her story firmly rooted in a particular social-historical context.

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