

The ‘Translated’ Cityscape: A Study of Select Satyajit Ray Films¹

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to examine the ‘translated’ nature of the cityscapes in Satyajit Ray’s films. With a select reading of films like ‘Mahanagar’ (lit. The Big City, 1963) and ‘Pratidwandi’ (The Adversary also called Siddhartha and the City, 1970), I argue for the ways in which the city becomes a space of contestation, debate, negotiation and translation between clashing ideologies of the old and the new, the rural and the urban, the ancient and the modern. Ray’s films have been studied from several perspectives, in terms of thematic, stylistic and ideological development. However, it seems to me that the city and its ‘translational’ aspect have not received enough attention. The present paper proposes to understand the role the city plays in Ray’s cinema. As an avant garde film maker, Ray’s cinema is replete with moments of conflicting ideologies, transitions and crossovers. It seems to me that the city provides the base for several such negotiations and intersections in Ray. Using certain recent developments in Translation Studies, I propose to read episodes in select Ray films as indicative of a larger ideological and cultural shift necessitated and made possible by/in the new space of the city. As a translating and translated space, the city’s agency enables other changes and transformations which would not have been possible in the absence of this primary actor – the city. The present paper is an attempt to look at several such moments of intersections and translations that Ray’s films make available to us.

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Keywords: City, Translation, Translational, Palimpsest, Transformation, Satyajit Ray.

Introduction: Locating the City in Translation Theory

Can we think of the city space in translational terms? Following recent developments in Translation Studies the city has been recognized as a site for/an agent in translation. Iain Chambers in his *'The Translated City'*, for example, remarks: "Cities as the sites of cultural encounters – from fifth century Athens with its Greeks, Persians and Egyptians, to present-day multi-cultured Los Angeles – are precisely where the outside world pushes into our interiors to propose immediate proximities [...] as the concentrated locality of such processes, and their augmented velocity, the city continually proposes the urgency of considering life, both ours, and that of others, in the transit proposed by translation" (1-3).

In her 2012 book *Cities in Translation: Intersections of Language and Memory*, Sherry Simon, draws our attention to the 'polyglot' nature of urban spaces: "There are no monolingual cities: all are sites of encounter and gathering and languages are part of the mix. But central to my project is the idea that each city imposes its own patterns of interaction and these emerge out of their spaces and their own narrative pasts. Contact, transfer and circulation among languages are determined by the demographics, institutional arrangements and imaginative histories of urban life. The cultural meanings of these transactions emerge through already ongoing conversations and aesthetic traditions" (Simon 2012: 2).

Simon goes on to suggest that it is not enough to call these cities bilingual, they are 'translational' in nature.

"These cities are not bilingual: they are translational. This term more adequately accounts for the range of relations which sustain the urban imagination – relations that include the indifference and negation as well as engagement and creative interference. Movement across languages is marked by the special intensity that comes from a shared history, a common territory and the situation of contending rights. Successful negotiation across these commonalities and differences becomes the very condition of civic coexistence" (Simon 2012: 3).

I use the word 'translational' in the above sense that recent scholarship in the field of Translation Studies has been using the term. I am particularly interested in the way Edwin Gentzler's recent work on translation and rewriting has opened up the field for further enquiry. Gentzler alerts us to the need of acknowledging this larger and more prominent presence of translation in our lives:

[...] I argue that rather than thinking about translation as a somewhat process of ferrying ideas across borders, we instead think about translation as one of the most important processes that can lead to revitalizing culture, a proactive force that continually introduces new ideas, forms or expressions, and pathways for change (Gentzler 2017: 8).

Following this line of conceptualization, we can regard translational cultures as being 'palimpsestic' in nature – a process that involves different linguistic registers for certain, but also involves creative interferences like the ones that will be discussed in this article. The multilingual context and the different linguistic and literary translations in the nineteenth century Calcutta make it an apt illustration of a translational culture.

Satyajit Ray's cinematic oeuvre depicts similar moments in the city - a translational city juggling with linguistic and cultural registers for creative expression, a fascination with the city space and the socio-cultural patterns that it generates. The city enables certain discourse and ways of life which though distinctly visible in Ray's cinema, is often shrouded by the international acclaim for the portrayal of rural Bengal in his films. However, in Ray's films the city has also been used as a modernist trope; commenting on the *ennui*, and fragmentary nature of life in the urban space and on the other, the city is also a site of negotiation and exchange, transformation and transactions. I look upon this space of negotiation and exchange that the city creates as 'translational' - a space of experimentation, innovation, movement and circulation vis-à-vis prevalent discourse, ideologies and identities. I will attempt to read the city in some of Ray's films as a space for similar translations. From Iain Chambers we have learnt that the forces of translation in the city "can be traced in multiple forms and formations: in the phenomenology of everyday life; in musical,

pictorial, and literary aesthetics; in clothing and culinary practices; in debating questions of faith; and in renewing the lexicon of philosophical and critical discourse” (Chambers: 102). A reading of select Ray films will help elucidate the above.

Pratidwandi: The City as a Space of Conflict and Negotiation

In Ray’s films, similar forces of translation are repeatedly visible in the depiction of a post-colonial Calcutta. In *Pratidwandi* (1970, *The Adversary*) the presence of the city cannot be overlooked. Chronicling the life in Calcutta of the 1960s through the eyes of the unemployed intellectual Siddhartha, the film captures several moments of frustration and enquiry mediated through the city. The movie opens with death, a motif that recurs in several forms through the film, death in terms of estrangement, alienation of human dreams and ambitions. It is noteworthy that all this is mediated through the city, the space that creates and maintains life, but the one that also becomes the space for death, both literally and metaphorically. Calcutta of the 1960’s, a city torn in conflicts, undergoing crisis of different kinds is also the city of Siddhartha’s struggle. Strangely, this is a city that seems to be the source of all Siddhartha’s misery, but there is a strong refusal to leave the city. Siddhartha keeps postponing job interviews that require him to leave Calcutta. The magic of the city, the melting pot of change and transformation that the city stands for, is repeatedly invoked in the course of the movie in varied ways.

After the opening scene of death, the credits appear to be travelling through the streets of the city, with the camera focusing on the movement of a bus, a means of public transport, connecting and ferrying the inhabitants of the city to their different destinations.²

² I would like to draw attention to the etymology of the word translation here. Trans + ferre, referring to movement, transfer and constant negotiation and exchange that any process of translation involves. Ray’s cinema deploys the idea of movement, transfer and ferrying constantly through the streets of the city. The images used in this article are from the films cited which are available in the



Fig 1

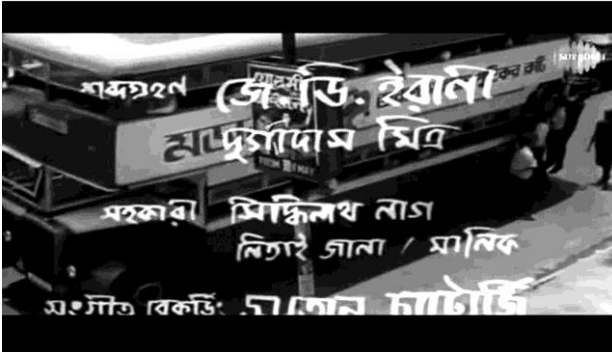


Fig 2

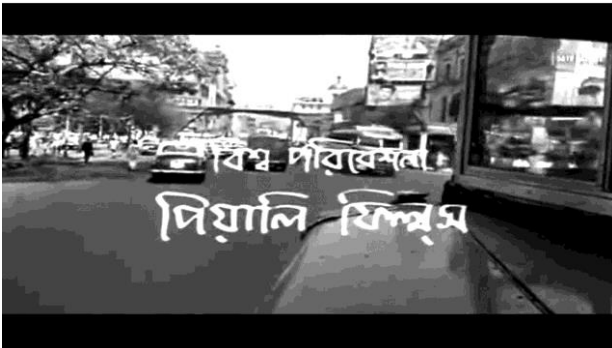


Fig 3

public domain. Fig. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 are from the film Pratiwandhi accessible on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enjp-LfY33s>

This opening image of traversing through the city, a *flâneur* like presence becomes a recurrent motif in the film. Siddhartha is repeatedly shown walking the crowded streets, and the overbearing presence of the city, its architecture, its people, its economy, its food cannot be divested from Siddhartha's journey in search of a job. As Iain Chambers reminds us, "A location is always the site of cultural appropriation and historical transformation, the site of a particular manner and economy of building, dwelling and thinking" (Chambers: 106). Siddhartha becomes the subject in Ray's film for exploring the interconnectedness of the space that is the city and the space that the individual occupies therein.



Fig 4



Fig 5

This space, however, is both of alienation and translation. The film focuses on Siddhartha's alienation amidst the crowded streets of Calcutta. He seems to be in his own world despite being surrounded by people always. This is rather symptomatic of the modern city which alienates and connects at the same time. The translated nature of Calcutta that the film depicts, is a 'dual city' in the sense in which Sherry Simon uses the term in her *Cities in Translation*. In elucidating what she means by 'dual cities', Simon says, "The special character of these cities lies in the presence of two historically rooted language communities who feel a sense of entitlement to the same territory. Each language is supported by institutions of similar authority – university, writer's association, publishing houses and governmental recognition" (Simon 2012: 3).

Particularly poignant in this regard is the interview episode in the film. Siddhartha is asked by a fellow applicant about the nature of such interviews and whether the questions will be in English. Through Siddhartha's entire interview, no one speaks in Bengali, the

impeccable accent and tone of British English cannot go unnoticed in the film. Often English and Bengali are used interchangeably. Ray scholars like Suranjan Ganguly notes how in Ray's films set after 1947, the British are nowhere to be seen, yet their language lives on, spoken by India's ruling elite, the westernized bourgeoisie.³ For Ray, the cultural critic deeply interested in the mechanisms of culture-making, this reversal is crucial in defining the postcolonial ethos in the India that his films portray. In the films about urban life made in the late 1960s and early 1970s, this syndrome is clearly visible. English, the language of power, of moving up the social and economic ladder, the language of modernity and the urban space that it signifies, is also the language of the other, and of othering. The cityscape is a constant witness to this othering, to a class of values and ideals that is only possible in the polyglot city.

Translating Gender in the City

If language is one way of othering, so is gender and its execution in the city space – gender becomes an important site of contestation and negotiation in the city. This happens in several ways, but particularly noteworthy is the transformation witnessed in terms of female agency and its execution in the urban space and its new found energy. As Brinda Bose rightly notes:

The city has occupied an ambivalent position in the Indian nationalist imaginary throughout the process of nation-building, often a confrontational, as well as contemplative space that signifies 'modernity' and its concurrent promise as well as ills in relation to the 'traditional' ethics of a very old culture, even while representing progress and development (presumably by Western frameworks of evaluation). Such progress has been traditionally perceived in India as a moral degeneracy of the nation (perhaps necessary but nevertheless demeaning), easily analogous with female sexual transgression/promiscuity - with the nation personified as woman (mother, goddess, mistress, prostitute). What makes this signifier interesting, however, is its simultaneous admission of a

³ See, Suranjan Ganguly, 'In Search of India: Rewriting Self and Nation in Satyajit Ray's *Days and Nights in the Forest*.' *Journal of South Asian Literature*, Vol. 30, No. 1/2, Miscellany, 1995, pp 162-172.

metamorphosed autonomy of the female Indian self. Non-normative female behaviour - particularly sexual - has always constituted a liminal space, a site of both empowerments through transgression and containment through regulation. The urban space - newly freed up and as yet un-proscribed, assumes the metonymic equivalence of available sexual freedom for women, its powers and its dangers (Bose 2008: 35).

The autonomy of the female self, her new found agency and its depiction in Ray's films have been much discussed. But the liminality of this space, this in-between domain which both generates and controls the agency is what I would like to draw attention to. The palimpsestic nature of this liminal space in Ray's cinema deserves attention. In *Pratidwandi*, there are repeated flashbacks to a childhood of innocence, an idyllic world, one untouched by the urban space and its newness. This is contrasted with the new woman, the kinds like the nurse who works part time as a sex worker or his own sister who is unlike the image of Siddharth's flashbacks.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7 ⁴

It seems as if the old space has been written over to create the new woman, the independent, modern and not so innocent sister of Siddharth whose transgressive behavior is repeatedly under question in the same space that has provided her a job, freedom and a life of her own.

The historical and political context of the characters who encounter the city and in turn translate and get translated by the city

⁴ The images used in this article are from the films cited which are available in the public domain. Fig. 6 and 7 are from the film *Pratidwandi* accessible on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enjp-LfY33s>

would need some closer analysis. In *Mahanagar* (1963, The Big City), Arati's family was trying to gain a foothold in post-partition Calcutta when women from middle-class refugee families were compelled to look for a job to support the family. On the other hand, Siddhartha's Calcutta was the product of intense political churning of various hues. Arati and Siddhartha's varied negotiations of the city indicate the many ways in which the personal and the political, the home and the world connected in the urban space of the city. While for the male protagonist, Siddhartha, the city seems to be stifling and alienating at one level, to Arati, the city opens up new opportunities and is liberating. The conflict between the outer world of the city and the space of the family is also different for the two characters. On one hand, Siddhartha seems to be full of rage and ultimately leaves the city, while on the other, Arati tries to negotiate and accommodate her new routine with familial duties. Their gender identities undoubtedly play a vital role in the ways in which they negotiate the city and its spaces. These negotiations are mediated through the city and its many players. The metaphor of the palimpsest becomes meaningful in understanding the urban space. For these spaces are of conflict and contestations where the old and the new jostle for existence. Spaces are written over to create new meanings and ways of life, but the writing over does not erase the old completely. In fact, the battle for space, the old and the new contesting the new-found space seems to be a recurrent motif in Ray's films. These are again intricately connected with questions of gender, language, space and movement which human agents traverse and make sense of.

In *Mahanagar* (1963, The Big City) for example, the change is lamented by the eldest in the Mazumdar family. He laments that he is unable to recognize Calcutta and its people, its streets and its new-found morals; morals that make his daughter-in-law take up a job and work for meeting the economic needs of the family. This 'unreal city', is beyond the recognition of those who are unable to come to terms with its rapid transforming nature. But even those who are the proponents of the new values of the city suffer from misrecognition. *Mahanagar*, has an interesting episode when Aarti, returning from her office, her new-found freedom and agency, narrates excitedly to

her husband about how her boss has appreciated her work and her promptness and efficiency, claiming that her husband would not have recognized her when she was at work. To this enthusiastic outburst of Aarti's, her husband sarcastically questions if he would be able to recognize her even at home? She seems changed, different, unrecognizable. Aarti, bringing her face close to her husband's says, she is the same, "the wife of the house"! This moment of reiteration of her identity in terms of validating the old, the conventional and thereby the correct, at that specific moment when Aarti has just started enjoying the space that the new, big city has opened for her is noteworthy. The palimpsestic texture that this moment, in terms of making space for the old and the new, draws us close to the 'translated' nature of the city space.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9⁵

As Amitabha Bhattacharya notes:

In Ray's films, Calcutta appears often as a frame of reference, sometimes as an adversary, often in the background and sometimes as dominant. Individual beings live and survive, sometimes innocently, sometimes acquiescing, not infrequently with a sense of guilt and a troubled conscience, in a society which is fast changing (Bhattacharya 1990/1991: 301).

⁵ The images used in this article are from the films cited which are available in the public domain. Fig. 8, 9 and 10 are from the film *Mahanagar* accessible on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjhjDLeQNH8>

The Space of Possibilities and Routes in the City

It is this grappling and negotiation with the new space that makes a translational perspective workable in appreciating Ray's films. Often, the spaces for such negotiations are cafés and street corners, public spaces which are also spaces of anonymity in the big and crowded city. One is reminded of the café scene in *Pratidwandi*, where Siddharth is lectured by a former college senior and current party leader about joining the party and the economic crisis of the present days. Cafés also feature in *Mahanagar*, where Aarti's husband seeks refuge and solace from the boredom of his unemployed life in a café where he overhears Aarti's conversation with a rich husband of her friend. These spaces of exchange, autonomy and anonymity are also spaces which open new routes, paths and possibilities.



Fig. 10

The modern city as Iain Chambers notes is both a space of roots and routes:

The classical sense of the city is consistently connected with the immediate history of a defined territory, the expression of an autochthonous culture. Nevertheless, in every city roots invariably turn out to be routes, historical and cultural passages that crisscross urban space offering entry into, and exit from, the immediate procedures of the locality. [...] In other words, how do we think of a city no longer in terms of an apparently homogeneous historical-

cultural text, but as a permeable site suspended in the challenge of translating and being translated through the accommodation of cultural and historical heterogeneity? (Chambers 2012: 105).

It seems to me that Ray's movies take us through the possibilities/routes that the city opens for the characters and thus for us as viewers who follow and travel the same routes, through the crisscross and web like nature of the city. The city, as a site for debate, dialogues, changing ideologies and morals; as a site of conflict and resolution, which again is mediated through the presence of the city as the primary interlocutor to the shifting paradigms symbolized in and by the city. As Supriya Chaudhuri poignantly remarks:

“And at all times there are the floating images of the city's streets and of a personal past: the vagrants, the hippies, the derelicts, the slum-dwellers (recalled in a shot which irrupts into the scene of the last interview), as well as the contents of Siddharth's dreams and memories. Siddharth imagines himself shooting his sister's employer, he dreams of his sister modeling a swimsuit, his brother facing a firing-squad. The film is as full of what does not happen as what does, the Real is inevitably absent except as an obscure object of desire” (Chaudhuri 2005: 266-67).

It seems to me that the possibility of these non-happenings can only be executed in the space that is the city. These routes and possibilities draw us as viewers, ‘as Siddharth is drawn, into the city's flux and movement, a relentless pushing and crowding’. Movement, journey and the overall theme of quest seems to connect many of Ray's films together. Particularly, *Mahanagar* and *Pratidwandi* are replete with images of travel, public transport, crowded buses, trams, cars and masses of moving bodies. One is reminded of the images of the crowded public transports, pushing and shoving bodies, the opening image of Siddhartha almost hanging from the bus, trying to balance and pay his ticket fare to the bus conductor, is a familiar scene to those who have used or use public transport in Calcutta. The mundaneness of such images according to me, makes these extraordinary in perpetrating the ways in which the city and its presence invades every space of human living, translating those into the flow of city life.



Fig 11

Fig 12

The city has its own translational practices just as Siddhartha has his. Having studied medicine for two years Siddhartha's fascination for the human anatomy often manifests in his translating the human bodies that surround him into their basic skeletal structures. The boredom and frustration of the routine job interviews translates in Siddhartha's imagination to an almost surreal rendition where he perceives skeletons waiting – translating thereby the death like nature of such wait and frustration into stark images of annihilation, while his classroom lectures on the human anatomy plays in the background.

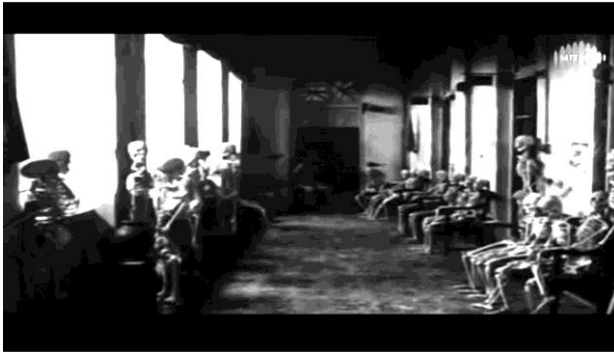


Fig. 13 ⁶

In *Mahanagar*, the final scene is particularly reminiscent of the possibilities that the city makes available to its residents. Gazing up at the sky and the skyscrapers, Arati seemingly seekingly enquires if

⁶ The images used in this article are from the films cited which are available in the public domain. Fig.11, 12 and 13 are from the film *Pratidwandhi* accessible on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enjp-LfY33s>

in such a big city of enormous possibilities there will be no jobs for at least one of them? She has just given up her earlier job, as an act of protest towards the office management and as a gesture of solidarity towards her female colleague who has been wrongly removed from her job. In fact, the courage to speak up for the correct cause is something that is not only connected with Aarti's essential character, but also with her new-found agency and confidence in the big city of possibilities. Her husband confirms this when he says that Aarti has done something that he would not have been able to do in a similar situation. This is also a moment where the possibility of mending of their somewhat strained bond as a couple is envisaged. The viewer is left guessing at this moment whether this possibility is a result of Aarti's giving up her job and thus becoming an equal to her jobless husband? While not completely overlooking this reading, the final scene of the film is one of hope and the routes of possibilities – Aarti and her husband vanishing into the multitudes, the big city of possibilities, together this time, man and woman seeking a future in the city of dreams and longing. The way in which the two bodies move into the city, negotiating the city afresh, with new determination and grit, with new hope to question and challenge the dehumanizing aspects of the city on the one hand and to embrace the possibilities on the other. Neither Aarti, nor her husband is the same person with whom the film had begun. They have been translated in the city. “We are all translated beings”, as Salman Rushdie would remind us much later in a different context.

Ray's Calcutta: The Translating City

Satyajit Ray's Calcutta was a fast-changing space of contestation and struggle. Calcutta often appears as a frame of reference in Ray's films – a frame that keeps shifting from a peripheral to a central location. Calcutta in Ray, operates in the shadows of the Bengal Renaissance, a period of developments and innovations both in the intellectual and socio-cultural domain. Ray's Calcutta is a city of possibilities, a city that has transformed and translated itself through the many shifts in the socio-cultural milieu. Be – be it in the coming of the railways, the institutionalized English education, the printing press, the rise of a new intelligentsia and the new dreams and

opportunities that came along with these transitions. The city witnesses these and many other transformations not as a passive onlooker, but as a participant – one who influences the course of action of the characters who enter the city and participate in the life the city creates. The city influences the decision of the characters, their choices and journeys which in turn translates into the spirit of the city. As Amitabha Bhattacharya reminds us, “[...] And to Satyajit Ray, Calcutta is much more than a living presence. It is in his blood-stream. A third generation Calcuttan, Satyajit grew in the city passing through its most profound transition. In his younger years, he came in direct contact with the great minds of India’s modernisation like Rabindranath Tagore and later, personally experienced the trauma that metamorphosed the city and its psyche. He allowed himself to be exposed to all the influences that the city brought to bear on him, for he likes big cities “to engulf and bewilder” him. He took the adversity in his stride and, therefore, could see both faces of the city—the humanising and the dehumanising. Ray’s films, attempting to capture this flux, would quite naturally be informed by a vision that is essentially urban.” The city translates and is also translated. The intersection of human bodies and memories within the space of the city raises pertinent questions about ways in which the city becomes the melting pot of dreams, aspirations on the one hand and their shattering on the other. In *Mahanagar*, for example, the city is the means to Aarti’s agency and freedom, it is the site of her aspirations and dreams; while for her father-in-law, the old idealist teacher, the transforming city symbolically represents the death of his values and ideologies. This clash of ideologies, it seems to me, is indicative of the ever-increasing fluid identities that the city space generates. Morals, beliefs and ideologies, ways of living, systems of livelihood flow and merge into each other. The city translates and colours individuals with its own imagination; such is the overwhelming power of the city. No individual or ideology remains untouched or unadulterated in the city space. Thus, dominant ideologies collapse, giving way to new debates and visibilities (the working woman, the companionate marriage in *Mahanagar* or the contending opinions about the Vietnam War in *Pratidwandi*). Needless to say, this is a two-way process. Being a space for mobility and influx, the city

adapts to the many who make the city their home. Be it in terms of the linguistic transformations or the cultural cross-overs, the cityscape keeps altering and renewing itself. The many-tongued existences, the plurality of life-styles, in its sheer variety and scope, the city takes, absorbs and transforms as much as it gives and alters. At times, the city fails as a translator, and rather becomes a helpless onlooker. This is perhaps best captured in a 1960 film, titled, *Devi*.

The film is set in nineteenth century rural Bengal with a feudal patriarchal system still in place. The story revolves around the patriarch, Kalikinkar Choudhuri's dream, a wish fulfillment of sorts, where he sees his daughter-in-law, Doyamoyee as the reincarnation of the goddess Kali. An ardent devotee as Choudhuri is, the film delineates the absurd and unusual wish of the patriarch and the consequences of it. On the surface of it, the film seems to be remotely connected to the city and can in no way be called a film that has the city as a major agent. However, on a closer look, the city, nineteenth century Calcutta seems a strong presence in the film translating discourses and ideologies the clash of which keep surfacing in the film. Umapasrad, Doyamoyee's husband and the patriarch's son becomes the connection to Calcutta, the city of possibilities, new ideas and revolution. Umapasrad almost metaphorically represents the city and its new -found ideologies. He brings these ideas to debate with his father, the contest between tradition and rationality, superstition and a scientific temperament are brought to fore through Umapasrad's character who is a product of the new education that the city life has imbibed in him. This contest between the old and the new continues in varied ways through the film with a sad resolution in the impossibility of translating blind faith and superstition into the progressive paradigms that the city nurtures. This is also the failure of the city in disseminating the new ideas and making those available for the many that remain outside its purview. The city as a translating entity fails in this and thus becomes an onlooker at Doyamoyee's tragic end. All that the city stands for – modernity, science, medicine, rationality and progressiveness are invalidated as it were through Doyamoyee's life course. However, the presence of the city and its attempts at rescuing Doyamoyee and her likes cannot be overlooked in the film. The ideological battle it seems will require many more

pervasive encounters with the city and its ideas for Doyamayee to be rescued. The film leaves us bewildered with haunting questions – did the city reach out enough for accomplishing the task? Was the city prepared to deal with the ensuing crisis? While such questions keep hovering on the viewer's mind the presence of the city looms larger than usual and a film remotely related to the city now seems to be intricately connected to the city, its ideologies, and its modernity.

Conclusion

Tracing the history of urban spaces and their imaginative impact Sherry Simon reminds us of the many connections that have been made between urban space and its power over the imagination in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Artists, creative writers, poets alike have referred again and again to the role of the city in the making of the human imagination and innovation. It seems to me that Ray's cinema is an expression of such imaginative innovations. Though critics like Chidananda Das Gupta, had complained about Ray's inability to address contemporary issues in the first decade of his filmmaking, 'the Calcutta of the burning trams, the communal riots, refugees, unemployment, rising prices and food shortages'⁷, yet, to me, Calcutta seems to be a constant presence in Ray's cinema. Not only in the films that comprise the Calcutta trilogy, but even in the Apu films, Calcutta seems to be one of the central points of return. Though, stereotypes like poverty and rural Bengal came to be associated with Ray's films after the success of *Pather Panchali* (1955), yet, in not many of his films is that the focus. Rather Calcutta makes its presence felt in almost all of Ray's films. Films like *Parash Pathar*, *Apur Sansar*, (partly) *Mahanagar*, *Charulata*, *Mahapurush*, *Pratidwandi*, *Seemabaddha Jana Aranya* and *Pikoo* have the city as the canvas. In some others, like *Kanchenjunga* or *Aranyer Din Ratri*, *Nayak*, or *Sonar Kella*, for example, the main characters are from the metropolis, and in works like *Aparajito Devi* and *Teen Kanya* the poignancy of Calcutta is evident.

⁷ Chidananda Das Gupta, 'Satyajit Ray: The First Ten Years', in *Talking About Films* (New Delhi, 1981), 72.

Often, the connectedness between the city and the village, the rural and the urban seems a recurrent trope in Ray's cinema. In *Aparajito* (The Unvanquished), the second in the classic sequence that is known to the world as the Apu Trilogy, for example, there is a memorable scene to this effect. Apu, just out of school, has arrived in Kolkata to enroll in a college. A newcomer and a stranger to the city, he finds himself in a busy street, a city bustling with life. Apu is still connected to his village world – symbolically represented in the globe that he clutches on to – the globe, an emblem of the world that was gifted to him by his teacher in the village school. As he stops to shelter from the rain he listens to people conversing in alien tongues - Pushto and Chinese. This is Apu's first experience of the city – a many tongued city that brings with it a sense of isolation, alienation, bewilderment and exhilaration amidst its crowded cacophony.

This estrangement and isolation is characteristic of most modern cities. Ray's films provide varied snippets from the life in this many-tongued city. Home to those who grew up there to witness the transformations, to those who migrated for different reasons in different phases of history, the city played important roles. Ray's imaginative camera takes us through the entanglements between the human and the city, all those moments of negotiation and transformation that often leaves us viewers bewildered at the shaping influence of the city on human lives. Characters like Siddhartha and Aarti cannot be imagined without Calcutta that flows and feeds into their identities, 'making new' the old and translating lives to fit into the city. Ray depicts the city and its various facets with utmost care in his films, be it the lower-middle-class household, the upper-class locality where Siddhartha's sister's boss lives, its prostitute-den, cinema hall where a bomb explodes, its college life and coffee houses, the restaurant by the side of the Ganges, its hippies, its massive public rally seen from the top of a skyscraper, its radical politics and wall posters and graffiti—all these make the city pulsate with enormity and contradictions. Ray's cinematic *oeuvre* captures the translational fabric of the city - the ongoing tensions and the liminal spaces that the city enables in translating prevalent values and creating confrontational and contemplative space of battles, real and imagined, between understandings of tradition and modernity,

stasis and development. The city in Ray's cinematic world becomes this ever renewing space that translates and is translated at the same time. The city ceases to be a well-defined fully formed entity. Rather, it is the becoming of the city that is noteworthy in Ray - the city that comes into being and keeps evolving through negotiating and translating the different domains of its existence.

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