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TAGORE, CINEMA AND THE POETRY OF MOVEMENT

Indranil Chakravarty

Introduction

It must have been almost impossible to be a writer in the twentieth century in any part of the world without some kind of response to the new and emerging narrative form called cinema or 'motion pictures'. As cinema's birth coincided with the onset of the 20th century, its own development and growth as an art form as well as an industry went almost hand-in-hand with the vicissitudes of social, political and cultural developments in the past century. The popular and frivolous base of cinema led most 'high brow' writers to turn their back towards it and many of them were oblivious of the extraordinary narrative experimentations that were being explored in this new form of expression. Whether cinema could at all be considered a valid 'art form' was debated till the 1960s though through the 1920s and 1930s, there was a sporadic phenomenon – mainly in Europe and USA - of painters, theatre directors and writers collaborating on film projects. It is only much later that many 'serious' writers like Borges, Greene, Cortázar, Puig, etc took a keen interest in cinema *per se*, writing film reviews and playfully deploying cinematic techniques in their literary works.

Many modern writers like Thomas Mann, Ernst Hemingway, Aldous Huxley, Scott Fitzgerald, Anthony Powell, etc made forays into cinema in the thirties and forties by writing screenplays only for financial reasons but rarely to understand it as a new narrative form. Some writers like Christopher Isherwood (who incidentally wrote several books on Indian philosophy) did this surreptitiously when he wrote the screenplay of *Goodbye to Berlin* in 1939 where he identified the narrator as a moving picture camera. Though this relationship between the film industry and the literary writer happened far more frequently in Hollywood than in the Indian film industry, Indian writers like Munshi Premchand who did take interest in cinema – not as an art form but as a medium to reach out to many people, the message of revolution - got quickly disenchanted with it. While artists like Brecht, Picasso, Dali or Cocteau got directly involved in the making of films, the 1930s literary *avant garde* in India was still contemptuous of cinema and the first time in our culture when we find creative crossovers into cinema from other art forms is when the great 'modern' dancer Uday Shankar (elder brother of the musician, Ravi Shankar) made an extraordinary film called *Kalpna* (Imagination) in 1948 or when the legendary Bengali theatre director, Shombhu Mitra made the highly 'modernist' film in Hindi, *Jaagte Rabo* (Stay Awake, 1956). In this context, Tagore's interest in cinema, his insightful comments about the future of this 'art form' and his brush with Hollywood as early as in 1920s stands out as something extraordinary.

Responses to Cinema

The poet's interest in cinema stemmed from his intense curiosity about anything around him that could provide him with a stimulus to "grow in all directions"¹. In other words, it was the same kind of impulse that initially led him to explore painting or even indigenous Canadian wood-carving. Though it is not certain what was his first reaction to cinema or which films he saw during his ten long international trips, it is certain that he saw in this new form, the beauty of movement. In fact, there was a period in his late life when he gradually moved away from the spoken word and drifted towards painting and dance. While the mystery inherent in the visual image increasingly consumed him in the form of painting, the poetical works of his later life display a certain predominance of visual imagery. He once referred to poetry as 'chchayachitra' (shadow images) or 'the film of prose'². The word 'chalachchitra' in Bengali refers to cinema itself and it is interesting how the poet was reversing the usage of the word. In fact, from 1930s onwards, the rhythm and mood of his poems evoke a comparison with the language of cinema.

Time and again, Tagore was fascinated with the stream-like quality of cinema, often drawing comparisons with music. This in itself is quite perceptive when we think of Henri Bergson's fascination with cinema as a stream in terms of the way it deals with time and space. In fact, Bergson was one of the first philosophers who incorporated cinema into philosophical discourse, emphasizing its epistemological dualism of intellect and intuition. Tagore seems to have grasped 'intuitively', in those early years, the fundamental philosophical properties of cinema: movement, fragmentation and time.

Though 'motion pictures' attracted him for what they are, his reaction was characteristically ambiguous. At times, he was fascinated with the possibilities inherent in it and in other times, dismissive of its tendency to pander to popular inclination for cheap thrills. One can see this ambiguity in his characterization of cinema as "the beauty of motion" in one place and in another, as "the inebriation with motion" or "the speed of motion". His secretary, Amiya Chakravarty, once wrote that when the poet alighted on European soil (possibly during the 1925 tour), he looked around and had commented that Europe was "one huge cinema". In the absence of any elaboration in this regard, it is upon us to wonder whether he saw Europe as beautiful images in movement or as obsessed with motion!

Tagore neither commented ever on any films based on his works nor did he make comments about the films of his time. Whether the poet really voiced his opinions about cinema is obscured by the arrogant, dismissive attitude towards it by the group of devotees who encircled him in *Santiniketan**. These people could never imagine how a 'spiritually' great man could be interested in any way with anything so 'crass' and popular as cinema. Interestingly, this was not how Tagore himself looked upon cinema or even popular culture. The only evidence we have are comments by well-known filmmakers of the time who adapted his works (Nitin Bose, Satu Sen, Madhu Bose, D.G. Ganguly, etc) but whose comments are suspicious as they were more keen to claim that they and their cinematic work, had the Poet's endorsement.

The poet's comments about this new art form were never systematically articulated by him in any essay and so the only way we can gather evidence in this regard is by putting together his stray comments about cinema found in some letters, essays pertaining to other cultural themes, travel-writing and reliable records of personal conversations with his contemporaries, in India and abroad. Many of these stray comments are surprising in their insightfulness. However, his impact on cinema runs far deeper than his personal responses to films in particular or cinema in general. Some of his literary works, - novels, short stories and even plays - have been adapted into films, in some cases by major Bengali film directors like Satyajit Ray. These films, which are based on Tagore's plots and characters, are part of our collective memory, not only in India but in the whole world. His songs are significantly present in the films of virtually all major Bengali filmmakers who have felt the compulsion to use them in order to deepen their characters' moments of anguish, solitude, joy or moral dilemma. The titles of many films in Bengali also allude to Tagorean phrases³. All this is hugely significant in the larger context of Indian cinema as several generations of sensitive filmmakers in the country have looked up to Bengali films for inspiration.

The single-most important perceptive comment that Tagore made about cinema is to be found in a letter he wrote in Nov 26, 1929 to a certain Murari Bhaduri⁴:

...The characteristics of an art form are determined by the nature of its requisites. I believe that the expected emergence of cinema as an art form is yet to take place. As in politics, so in art, the aim is independence. The aim of art is to express itself freely in its self-created world. Otherwise, its dignity is lost, the manifestation marred.

The fact that cinema has so long been subservient to literature is due to the fact that no artist has been able to redeem it from this slavery by dint of his genius. It is difficult because in the case of painting, literature or for that matter in music, the material requisites are not so expensive. Production of a picture needs not only talent but also finance.

The principal element of a motion picture is the "flux of image". The beauty and grandeur of this form in motion has to be developed in such a way that it becomes self-sufficient without the use of words. If some other language is needed to explain its own, it amounts to incompetence. If music can achieve profundity without words of the cadence of a melody, then why should not this "motive form" be considered as a distinct aesthetic experience?

If it has not been so, it is partly due to the lack of talent and partly due to a muddle-headed public who, not being able to experience intellectual pleasure, has become a victim to sensationalism.

This letter is fascinating in the sense that while it reveals his thinking about cinema of the silent period, it raises even more questions. And if we investigate the circumstances that obliged him to write such an unusual letter to a person he was certainly not close to, a strange complexity unfolds.

In 1928, the Eastern Film Syndicate produced a film based on a Tagore story titled 'Bicharak' (Judge) which was directed by the legendary Bengali theatre director, Sisir

Bhaduri. The story follows the trials of Khiroda, a 'fallen' woman in her late years who is homeless and in her despair intends to commit suicide but in the attempt, she survives while her child dies. An allegation of murder is now brought against her and the judge is a hypocrite who had once exploited her sexually and had in fact, pushed her into a path of self-destruction but now stands in judgment, condemning her to death.

On its release, the film's critique of patriarchy created a scandal of sorts and was eventually banned by censors for "the ugly, unnatural event that may be based on reality but not worthy of being represented on the screen"⁵. The film was denied certification for its "low taste" despite the fact that it was associated with two of Bengal's greatest icons of "high culture". Tagore was in a dilemma, not knowing how to react to this situation as he was requested to come out publicly with an open condemnation of the banning. The poet was ambiguous in his reaction. He possibly did not like the film at all but he had a high opinion about the director. The fact that he asked Bhaduri to stage his play 'Tapati' the next year shows that his esteem remained undiminished even after seeing the film. On one hand, he did not like the idea of banning and on the other, he didn't like the film but liked the director. He had once written to one writer (Saratchandra Chatterjee) when his novel was banned that the banning had actually enhanced his prestige as it demonstrated the subversive power of literature. Further, his dilemma was that he could not remain silent on the protest against banning. And so, he carefully phrased his words with a general commentary about cinema and how production conditions can hamper the quality of a film. He could thus avoid endorsing the film while still defending the director and refrain from joining the anti-banning campaign while still upholding the subversive power of fiction. Precisely for this reason, he addressed it to the brother of Bhaduri who had pleaded for his support and not the director himself.

Film theoreticians and historians of cinema in the late 1920s (mainly Paul Rotha and Terry Ramsaye) had made strikingly similar comments as Tagore but the bard's musings were not based on any film-scholarship but pure intuition. In fact, among the many things that the letter reveals is the disappointing fact that despite his frequent visits to Europe, the poet was completely oblivious of the European *avant garde* cinema of the 1920s, particularly German expressionist cinema which flourished in full measure by the time he wrote the letter and with whom he unknowingly shared some key thematic concerns. However, it is not difficult to understand the tone of frustration and contempt based on the Indian films he may have seen. Though very few films have survived from the silent period in India, there was certainly no conspicuous artistic tendency till that time. On the other hand, most films that he saw onboard the ship during his several long journeys, must have been of the popular sensationalist variety if we go by his fleeting descriptions of the rambunctious seafarer's lifestyle.⁶

Imagery

In terms of theme and visual imagery, Tagore's masterly symbolist play *Raktakarabi* (Red Oleanders, 1924) stands in an interesting relationship with a masterpiece of world cinema made around that time. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), the last great work of German expressionist cinema, and *Raktakarabi* are strikingly similar dystopias. Both of them deal with an imagined future where human beings have been de-humanised and the

world sharply polarized into owners and robotic workers and in both cases they are roused/re-humanised by an ethereal female character (Maria/Nandini) who reconciles the schism between the hand and the brain (in Lang's allegory, the hand and the heart). While Lang felt that mechanisation and assembly-line production would strip away freedom and dignity from human beings, *Raktakarabi* is a portrayal of an agrarian society giving away to an industrial one. Charles Chaplin dramatized the same, a few years later, in a vastly different tragic-comic mode in his film *Modern Times* (1936) but evoking the same anguish and similar metaphors.



'Rakta karabi' by Ganesh Pyne, 1957, watercolour, 42.5x28cm, Private Collection

In one of his essays, 'The Modern Age'⁷, written almost at the same time as the play, Tagore uses an unusual western imagery:

In modern civilisation for which an enormous number of men are used as materials, and human relationships have, in a large measure become utilitarian, man is imperfectly revealed.... The prevalence of the theory which realizes the power of the machine in the universe and organises men into machines, is like the eruption of Etna, tremendous in force, in its outburst of fire and fume; but its creeping lava covers up human shelters made by ages, and its ashes smother life.

Despite the vast differences in the treatment of the thematic material, anyone familiar with *Metropolis*, will recall strikingly similar images evoked by *Raktakarabi*. Tagore's attempt at creating a physical, inter-disciplinary 'total theatre' comes very close to Fritz Lang's vision of cinema. It is unfortunate therefore that Tagore was never aware of Fritz Lang's film because he could have whole-heartedly connected with it and his opinion that the "emergence of cinema as an art form is yet to take place", would have been severely challenged.



Still frames from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, 1927

Film Encounters

Tagore was caught in the whirlwind of international stardom and relentless travel from 1912 onwards. During the last of his ten long international trips in 1930 spanning eleven months, he travelled to 7 countries and 23 cities at the age of 69. During this period he saw in a small

town near Munich, a Passion Play movie. He was left so deeply moved by the experience that he wrote overnight a story for the screen, directly in English and called it *The Child*. He had received an offer from *Universum Film AG* (UFA), a film company that was the principal film studio in Germany during the Weimar Republic and through World War II, and a major force in world cinema from 1917 to 1945. The concreteness of this offer from UFA is testified by two letters sent to Tagore by Mr. Kaufmann, the head of the studio (still preserved at the Archives in Santiniketan). The film was to be directed by Himansu Rai, a famous Bengali director who later became one of the pioneering figures of the Hindi film industry in Bombay, in collaboration with his friend, Franz Osten, a German film director. The fate of *The Child* was caught in the whirlwind of international politics, particularly with the rise of Fascism and the corresponding changes in the power structure of the studio which had given him the initial offer. The film was also caught in the massive transition that was happening within the film industry around 1929-1930 when the silent cinema converted to sound. Tagore had once commented that the flow of images in films should not be frequently interrupted by the textual intervention of inter-titles and had thus possibly intended to minimize the use of words while what the industry demanded now, after the transition to sound cinema, was the elaborate use of sound and dialogue. This meant that he had to completely rework the 'screenplay' of *The Child*. The project gradually faded away and when he realized that the film would not happen, he translated it back into Bengali as a poem which was called *Shishu Tirtha* (The gathering of children) with 6 chapters, the first of which was written like a screenplay. This may be considered one of the early instances of novelization of cinema.

Between 1934 and 1938, Tagore had a close brush with Hollywood. A friend of his, Edward John Thompson, who had written his biography in 1921 and was the priest of a Methodist church in Bengal, had mediated between him and a major Hollywood producer for a film that would be based on one of Tagore's dance-dramas. It is not very clear how keen the producer (the Hungarian, Alexander Korda) was but it is certain that both Thompson and Tagore were less excited about the new form and more keen to break the negative Hollywood stereotypes about India and Indians. Though his friend was very eager, he sounded half-hearted. In a letter to Thompson on 6th January 1935, he wrote:

I do not trust that a Hollywood company can make a proper cinematic rendering of my play. That is why, though I often get these kinds of offers, I do not feel very enthusiastic. However, if you are hopeful about it, that is a different matter since you are familiar with both the language and culture of this country.

Alexander Korda presumably had reservations about Tagore's dance drama *Chitrangada* because he thought it lacked "conflict". Thompson offered the novel *Gora* as an alternative but in a delightfully revealing statement, his friend told him, "Korda is suspicious of anything that even remotely smells of poetry" (22nd March, 1935). Korda's unrelenting emphasis on "conflict" was deeply Aristotelian in nature which Hollywood cinema of that time unconsciously embraced as the only 'right' way of telling stories. Tagore's plays or novels, on the other hand, were not at all conflict-driven but idea-driven and in a way, Tagore was challenging 'western' modes of dramaturgy as the only valid narrative mode. It was naïve for Thompson to imagine that any screenwriter could actually take out the plot and characters of Tagore and convert them into a specifically Hollywoodian narrative framework, that too with the approval of the poet.

His deep-rooted doubts about Hollywood's willingness for narrative experimentations may have played a role in accepting the offer of inaugurating the British Empire Film Institute earlier in 1926, which he forcefully supported as an oppositional force against Hollywood's trivialization of the art of cinema. However, his endorsement of a British institution may have been a strategic public declaration of his condemnation of Benito Mussolini with whom he had forged a warm relationship in a moment of political naiveté. Though the British film enterprise was short-lived, Tagore's engagement with cinema could not have been merely a political move. His emphasis on cinema as an autonomous art form may have led to his invitation for a lecture at an international film conference in Canada in November, 1930⁸.

Caught in the middle of a political whirlwind, Tagore was not fully aware the extent to which his visits to different countries were seen as political statements. The British and the Swiss government stopped him from going to Spain; the Swedish government went to the extent of employing an attractive woman spy who monitored him constantly and though the British tried hard to stop him from visiting communist Russia, he managed to visit the country whose supreme leader (Lenin) had once declared that "of all the arts, cinema is to us the most important".

Tagore's response to Soviet Union was initially euphoric but ultimately very ambivalent in tone. There he was shown parts of Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *General line* (1929) apart from visiting a film studio and meeting directors and technicians as he was on an official guided tour of the government. When the film-workers of the studio asked him what he thought of this new 'art form', he made a few interesting statements. His main point was that if cinema was to liberate itself as an autonomous art, it had to stop being a slave to literature. He objected against too much use of inter-titles in silent films. Eisenstein's wife Vera Atteshova even mentioned that Tagore clasped his fists tight during the 'Odessa Steps' sequence of *Battleship Potemkin* and later said that he was thinking of making a film about the history of mankind. His spontaneous descriptions of that hypothetical film show that he wanted to use cinema to assert India's 'spirituality' against the 'materialism' of the west⁹.

Most of Tagore's film projects were stymied efforts. In popular film industry parlance, a mere 10% of all film projects discussed in the production circuit actually materialise. It is striking that despite his star status, his endeavours too met the same fate. In 1929, it was announced with much fanfare in the leading newspapers of the time that the British Dominion Films Company were about to produce a film directed by Dhirendranath Ganguly, a cinematic adaptation of Tagore's play, *Tapati*, starring the poet, "Dr. Tagore", in the lead role. Students of Santiniketan were to participate in the film too. This too did not materialise. The poet was possibly trying to inject new blood into Santiniketan through a contact with this new technological form. According to director Nitin Bose's personal account:

... A dance recital of Tagore songs was organized on the terrace of Uttarayan, the house where Tagore was staying. He asked me to film the programme. I filmed the recital patch by patch sequentially and then processed the entire film...When I projected the film before *Gurudev**, he complemented me and showed a great deal of interest in the technique of filming. Then he asked me to screen it again. I was so thrilled and touched by his words of

encouragement that when the second screening of the film ended late at night, I presented the film to him and it is now Santiniketan's property.¹⁰

Tagore's involvement with cinema also included 'helping out' young directors like Madhu Bose with the script of *Giribala* (1929), a film based on his story, 'Manbhanjan' and attending the premiere of a film called *Dalia* (1930) made by Madan Theatres. He may have partially written the screenplay of *Dalia* which was based on one of his stories of the same name but later merged this story with a novel ('Rajorshi') that he was writing at that time. Tagore composed and recited a special poem on Dec 19, 1932 for the inaugural ceremony of Rupabani, a Calcutta cinema hall. The director whose film inaugurated Rupabani (PC Barua) received a recommendation letter from Tagore that got him an apprenticeship at the Fox Studios in Paris. This shows that the poet had worldwide film contacts. Tagore was also present at the premiere of the Bombay Talkies' blockbuster film *Achhut Kanya* (Untouchable Maiden) in March 1937 at the Paradise Theatre in Calcutta.

His only direct involvement with filmmaking was when Calcutta's leading film studio of the time, New Theatres, offered him the opportunity to make a film in 1932 on the occasion of his 70th birthday. This 'film', *Natir Puja*, based on his poem 'Pujarini' (staged in 1927) was actually the photographed version of a play he staged/shot in a Calcutta studio for 5 days with his Santiniketan students and two stationary cameras. The film was destroyed in a major fire at New Theatres in 1940 which obliterated for posterity several classics of Bengali cinema. *Natir Puja*, however, was far from being a classic. It was, in fact, a disaster and Tagore himself acknowledged it as a failure.¹¹ Only recently, in 2011, parts of whatever survived of *Natir Puja* have been restored and it confirms that it was merely photographed theatre. It shows no attempt to explore film language and even in terms of choreography and acting, the performances were poor. Tagore possibly thought of the film as a recording of his stage play which would have saved him from travelling too much in his advancing years.

Major Adaptations

Bengali cinema is well-known for its deep links with literature, especially till the mid-1970s and it can well be argued that the severing of that link has led to a qualitative decline in cinema. In fact, the relationship was so well-ensconced in the minds of viewers that the Bengali word for film-viewing was 'boi-dekha' or 'watching a book'.

Over the years, close to a 100 films, more than half in Bengali, have been made on Tagore's works, making him one of the most adapted writers of all times, after Shakespeare. Many of these films have been lost for ever. Bengali cinema thus thrived on Tagore's plots, characters, music and poetry. There is hardly any sensitive filmmaker in Bengal who has not drawn upon Tagore's stories or particularly his songs. However, the choice of films have often depended largely on the popular appeal of the stories. For example, the most popular adaptation is *Kabulivala* - by Tapan Sinha (in Bengali, 1957), by Hemen Gupta (in Hindi, 1961) and by Siddique Lal (in Malayalam, 1993) - a story which was chosen for its melodramatic elements and yet which transcended these elements to assert a love for a broader humanity. The Afghan man from Kabul who has to leave his own daughter behind and finds a daughter substitute in Mini, a small girl in

Calcutta, may be strong and stout in his physical exterior which stands in sharp contrast to his soft interior. He is capable of any audacity in life - he kills a man for not paying back his money - but utterly vulnerable in love. Beyond the basic emotional message, the film shows a love for the outsider and for another culture – an abiding theme in Tagore.

Undoubtedly, the most significant film directors in adapting Tagore's works are Satyajit Ray (four films) and Rituparno Ghosh (*Chokher Bali*, *Noukadubi/ Kashmakash* and a TV serial titled *Ganer Oparey*). *Charulata* (1964), arguably Ray's greatest work, is based on a novella titled 'Nashtanir' (The Broken Nest) which in turn was 'remade' into a sensitive American film by Ira Sachs titled *Forty Shades of Blue* (2005) which won the top honours at the off-Hollywood Sundance Film Festival.

Satyajit Ray's connection with Tagore is so direct that one can consider it the most important aspect of the poet's influence on cinema. If Tagore was the supreme cultural figure of India in the first half of the 20th century, the greatest cultural personality of post-independent India (second half of the 20th century) was Satyajit Ray. Ray was linked to Tagore through the *Brahmo Samaj** movement, as well as his own studies as a student at Tagore's university at Santiniketan. Ray was also connected to Tagore through his father and grandfather (also great writers) who were close friends of the poet. Universally considered as one of the foremost film directors in the history of world cinema, Satyajit Ray was also a 'Renaissance Man' like Tagore: writer of brilliant detective fiction, hugely popular among children, and also a music composer and essayist. Ray adapted several of Tagore's literary creations – a novel (*Ghare Baire/The Home and the World*, 1984), a novella (*Charulata*, 1964), three short stories (*Teen Kanya/Three Daughters*, 1961) which included *Postmaster*, *Monihara* and *Samapti* and a full-length documentary on Tagore titled, *Tagore* in 1961 on the occasion of the poet's birth centenary. According to his own admission, the documentary consumed so much time and labour that it was equivalent to the work on three feature films. Apart from these, Ray had also used several of Tagore's songs in his films which were not based on Tagore's works.

Ray acknowledged Tagore's overwhelming influence but yet maintained a critical distance. His documentary *Rabindranath*, started with the following statement, narrated in Ray's own baritone voice:

On Aug 7, 1941 a man died. His mortal remains perished but he left behind him a heritage that no fire could consume.

Elsewhere, he also mentioned his personal sense of creative indebtedness:

I consider the three years I spent at Shantiniketan at the most fruitful period of my life. This was not so much because of the proximity to Tagore who continued to remain unapproachable. It was just that Shantiniketan opened my eyes for the first time to the splendour of Indian and Far Eastern art. Until then I was completely under the sway of western art, music and literature. Shantiniketan made me the combined product of East and West that I am. As a filmmaker, I owe as much to Shantiniketan as I do American and European cinema.¹²

Elsewhere, he wrote of Santiniketan as 'a world apart':

It was a world of vast open spaces, vaulted over with a dustless sky, that on a clear night showed the constellations as no city sky could ever do. The same sky, on a clear day, could summon up in moments an awesome invasion of billowing darkness that seemed to engulf the entire universe.¹³

Following the public outcry from conservative circles in Calcutta about the adaptation of Tagore's 'Nashtanir' (Broken Nest), Ray responded with anger and wrote at length about his adaptation strategies in *Charulata*¹⁴. This is possibly the best analytical reflection by any filmmaker ever in relation to changes that need to be made while moving from one medium to another while still maintaining the soul of the original story.

His Songs

Tagore himself felt that his songs would outlive anything else that he had written¹⁵. His songs are found in the films of virtually every sensitive Bengali filmmaker. Rabindrasangit, as they are known, started getting assimilated in cinema ever since the 1930s and the coming of sound, when the Indian film industry flourished and often used songs and dances to counter the domination of Hollywood cinema and successfully managed to marginalize it.

The use of Tagore songs in films is related to the fact that in the popular imagination, Rabindrasangit has come to represent the ultimate symbol of Bengali identity and a sophisticated expression of sublime spirituality within a completely *secular* framework, connecting our own modernity with the ancient philosophy of the *Upanishads**. Even die-hard atheists are known to succumb to the emotional power of his songs. An appreciation of this musical genre has to be based on the realization that Rabindrasangit is neither pure melody nor pure poetry but a third independent entity where, in its finest moments, poetry fuses completely into music, and music into poetry and the two, which may not have fully stood up on their own, now become inseparable. Perhaps the most memorable moments of such usage in a film to deepen character and mood, is Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The Cloud-Capped Star, 1960), Ray's *Kanchenjunga* (1962) or more recently, Aparna Sen's *Paramitar Ekdin* (A day in the life of Paramita, 2000). Ever since the expiry of Tagore's copyright in 2001, many contemporary experimentations are ongoing, mostly by adding greater orchestration to his songs. One of the better examples of these endeavours is the TV serial made by Rituparno Ghosh titled *Gaaner Oporey* (On the other shore of music, 2011) whose plot itself revolves around a group of young boys and girls learning Rabindrasangit and discovering how Tagore's songs can give sublime expression to their private moments of love and anguish.

NOTES

¹ "...I feel that I must have all my interests alive, grow on all sides, and enter into various relations with the world, keeping my body and mind fully awake." (*Letters to a Friend*, Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 2002) p.25

² See Someswar Bhowmik's book in Bengali, *Ruper Kalponirjhar* (Ananda Publishers, Kolkata, 2011) p.24

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- ³ Titles of many Bengali films are allusions to Tagore's poems: *Har Mana bar*, *Ai Korechheco Bhalo*, *Suno Baronari*, *Sagar Sangame*, *Khaniker Atithi*, *Do bigha Zamin* (Hindi), *Baishe Sravan*.
- ⁴ Brother of Sisir Kumar Bhaduri, legendary stage actor of Bengal.
- ⁵ Aruna Vasudev, *Liberty and License in Indian Cinema* (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978) pp 48-49
- ⁶ In Bengali: "Paschim Jatrir Diary", *Rabindra Rachanavali* (West Bengal government, 1961), Volume 10, p. 468
- ⁷ Creative Unity, 1922
- ⁸ *East Anglian Daily Times*, 15th October, 1930
- ⁹ See Someswar Bhowmik's book in Bengali, *Ruper Kalponirjhar* (Ananda Publishers, Kolkata, 2011) pp. 105-110
- ¹⁰ Text of a radio interview with Nitin Bose, quoted in Nirupama Sheth and Ajit Sheth's *Tagore: Indian Film and Indian Music* (Sangeet Bhavan Trust, Bombay, 1986) pp. 19-20
- ¹¹ After seeing the rushes of *Natir Puja*, Tagore is on record to have murmured to the people around him: "Have I made this film? In that case, no more film direction for me." Quoted in *Ruper Kalponirjhar*, p. 141
- ¹² Satyajit Ray, *Our Films their Films* (Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1976)
- ¹³ Quoted in Andrew Robinson, *Satyajit Ray – The Inner Eye*, London, 1989, p.55
- ¹⁴ Originally written in Bengali. Translated into English as 'On Charulata' in *Speaking of Films* (Penguin, New Delhi, 2005) pp. 142-175
- ¹⁵ In a letter to his friend William Rothenstein, he wrote: "I know the artistic value of my songs ... Though they will not be known outside my province, and much of my work will be gradually lost, I leave them as a legacy."