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NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 54 - REFUGEE WOMAN AND PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

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HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak

- Ray's films approach the watershed from a point of extraordinary confidence on humanitarian grounds. The strength of Ray's films lies in underlining what the post-Partition Bengali immigrants have and what they can.
- Ghatak narrates Partition through myth, art and music, converging on the ordinary aim of advocating rights for only a specific group to which he belongs.
- While Ghatak has a love-hate relation with Calcutta, seeing the city as responsible for the East Bengalis' immigration and plight, their joblessness and the Bengal's Partition, Ray sees the city as a fellow-sufferer with the Bengali populace, both natives and immigrants.

Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak

- Whereas Ghatak's films, *Subarnarekha* and *Bari Theke Paliye*, focus on the protagonists' leaving Calcutta to return "home," albeit with changed perceptions, in *Parash Pathar*, Ray's opening sequence shows a man's miniscule figure from above, trying to cross a busy street in a big city. As this individual figure eventually acquires prominence before the camera, it implies an endlessness of seemingly absurd possibilities within Calcutta (Malini Bhattacharya 1009).
- Priyanka Shah questions the possible typecasting in Ghatak's films:

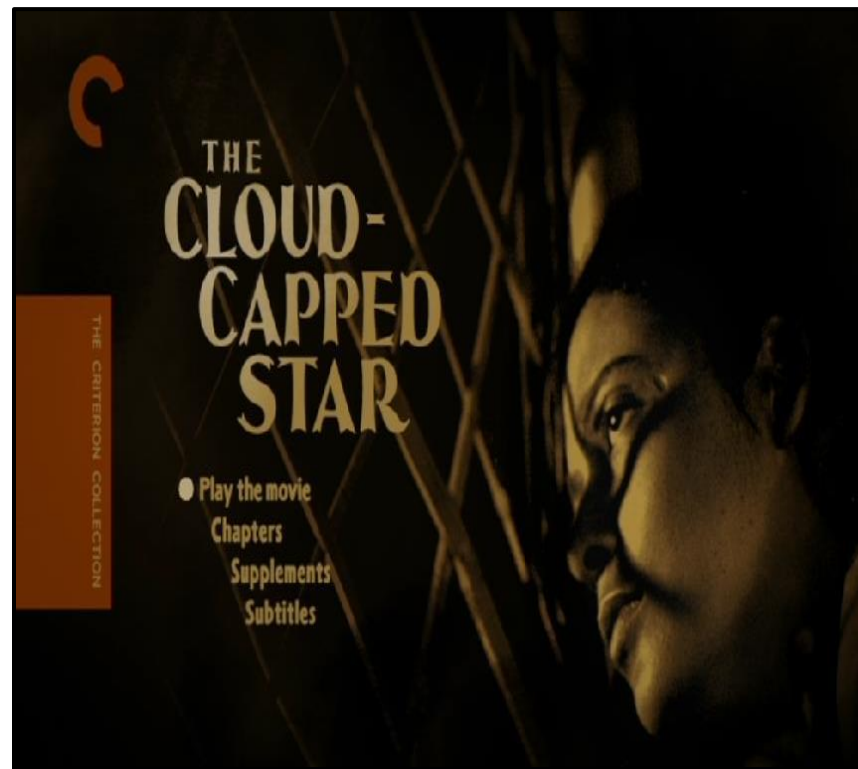
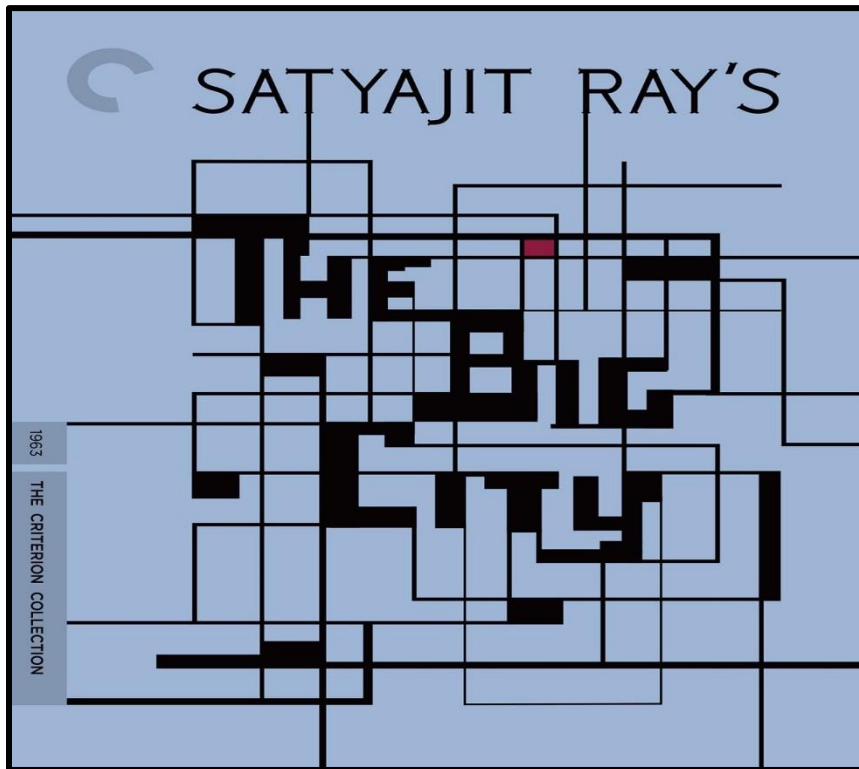
East Pakistan has been portrayed in Ghatak's films as an idyllic place breeding prelapsarian innocence and purity. On the other hand, Calcutta has been time and again portrayed as a dumping ground of debris. Calcutta to Ghatak, is a place which he loved to hate and hated to love. If East Pakistan is portrayed in the shadow of the Emile Bronte's Yorkshire moors, vibrant and innocent, then Calcutta resembles Dickens' London, a dark world of apocalyptic stupor (126).



Mahanagar and Meghe Dhaka Tara

- *Mahanagar* provides a personalized platform to the story of the female protagonist, who, despite being a bearer of the socio-economic adversities of Partition, cannot be entirely defined in terms of her refugee identity.
- The film is an antithesis to the nationalized accounts that have been consciously appropriating or misrepresenting women. The heroine has a different story to offer about her own professional sphere, which, even if carrying the lasting impressions of Partition, succeeds to overcome the accounts of nostalgia, suffering, or an overdone tale of women's success caused as a result of Partition.

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- *Mahanagar* does not follow Ghatak's predictable line, where the Bengali refugee woman is put up as a demi-Goddess, and epitomized as a miniaturized, bonsai Bengali nationhood.
- The figure of the *banga bala*, torn Bengali motherland, keeps coming back in Ghatak's work. It replicates the Indian nationalist rhetoric in narrating Bengali nationalism with the same fervor through the figuration of the ill-fated woman.
- In the length of the journey traversed by Arati from her home to the world lies a distantiation from the immediate post-Partition syndromes. During this phase, she acquires components of optimism and individualism. Arati does not enact the role of a gendered mythical model, who is portrayed in the tragic, messianic shades through the lens of the patriarchal history.
- Compared to Nita, whose tenacious *bhadra* or 'correct' conduct keeps the last strings of prestige attached to her impoverished family, Arati's ventures as a saleswoman – someone traditionally looked down upon by the *bhadralok* – narrates a new experience.

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- Both Arati and Nita's working status summon an inversion of gender space and gender roles, as is reflected in significant moments, such as Nita returning after a day's work and Sanat serving her a glass of water, or Arati's mother-in-law serving her the lunch and afterwards cleaning away her dish, as if she were the patriarch of the household.
- Both Arati and Nita dispense their salary for their respective kinfolk's needs. Yet, Nita's act of giving is programmed and pressurized by her circumstances, hardly allowing the audience to inquire her will, whereas Arati, spending at least a part of her first income on buying gifts, is allowed a relatively greater room of independence.
- As a result, neither Arati's profession nor her household is able to wring out duties from her, as she ultimately does not compromise her self and is in charge of her own priorities. Contrarily, Nita becomes the utopia of the male idealist, devoting her wages for her family's prosperity, even as her obligatory job looms on her in the form of depression, disease and finally, death.

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- Arati is caring and dutiful to each member, but not an icon of sacrifice.
- She is not goddess-like in her virtues, but timidly picking up from her job experience and the public space, until family does not remain her only pretext for being the earning woman. Her husband is perplexed, when she lets out her knowledge about “commission” – a money earned besides the basic salary through negotiation with the boss. At this point, she also mentions her boss by his first name, calling him Himangshu *babu* rather than Mr. Mukherjee.
- In all these actions, a subjective side of a demanding worker comes up, who, in the process of manufacturing want among others as a saleswoman, has also learnt to desire. This newly acquired desire is shown in the scene, where Arati sniffs the money in her first pay-envelope (Callenbach 47). Nita, on the other hand, working both at home and in the office, is unable to get the most out of her earning status, as she cannot centralize her importance either within or without.

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- Ray has moved ahead of the “Ghatak school’s” impression that immigrant-based coalitions can always be smoothly accomplished, by questioning the very assumption that “refugee-ness” is homogeneous. He disagrees that a pre-Partition geographical closeness between two people can disregard their present-day class-based differences, within the metropolitan structure of Calcutta (Banerjee 272).
- As more commercially tenable factors such as profit, greed and success get pulled into the relationships, Arati, as an urban middle-class female immigrant, can connect more with her female Eurasian colleague, than her rich male East Bengali boss. Her friendship with Edith is possible, by overlooking the linguistic-communal differences and instead espousing the gender-economic sameness.
- It is not enough to see Arati only with respect to her sex appeal or modesty, as she is constantly playing with her physical appearance and putting it to test against her male relationships – from husband at home to boss in the office – in order to explore her own identity.

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- Paulomi Chakraborty- Arati's company's selling the knitting machine, which replaces hand knitting, her gifting her son a toy gun rather than telling him fairy-tales; the family's borrowing a thermometer from the neighbour or the intermittent flowing in of evening news from the radio – imply a touch of technology that conceals the past. Arati's image as the new woman is made possible by covering up her Partition experiences, wherein her entity as the refugee woman exists.
- While Arati is not a part of the utopian Communist dream as motivated by Ghatak's cinematic canon, she is also not crushed like Nita, under its ambiguously liberating forces.

Narendranath Mitra's "Jaiba"

- Narendranath Mitra's short story "Jaiba," was first published in *Chaturanga* in the winter of 1948 and republished in a collection-*Galpamala*.
- Narendranath Mitra's story revolves round a young middle class couple, Mriganka and Sudatta. The structure of the household is very modern, nuclear, marked by the absence of parents and relatives.
- Mriganka is a Professor of Chemistry, whose wife had been abducted in Lahore and recovered later. In her days of abduction, she had become pregnant.

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- Mriganka has accepted her back into the folds of domesticity. The reader does not come across any character who messes with this order. Sudatta gives birth to the child and arrangements are made to put the child in an orphanage. However, there is one impulsive moment, when Sudatta looks at her child's face and at that moment it is her motherhood that dominates her being. She looks at her child with love. This does not go unnoticed and Mriganka decides to take the child home.
- Mriganka however, develops an obsessive interest in biology, heredity and the effect of genes. Sudatta faces the greatest crisis when she finds her husband looking at the child and making notes in his diary and she becomes desperate to abort the second child she now conceives with her husband.
- She is afraid that this would only make him interested in a comparative study.

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- “After a few moments of hesitating silence, [Sudatta] said, "Dactarbabu, you know I have conceived again. But this time it has not yet reached such an advanced stage. I am sure you can help me at least this time.” This proclamation portrays the condition of Sudatta and Mriganka’s marriage.

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- In the context of Partition violence, the abduction of Sudatta and the aftermath of it have serious consequences in the short story.
- Mriganka's stand to accept Sutapa as well as her baby, yet after the birth his use of the 'illegitimate' child as specimen portrays the dichotomy of his attitude.

Angapali (Embrace) by Ramapada Choudhury

- *Angapali* (Embrace) by Ramapada Choudhury presents the return of Sabita, a formerly abducted woman, to the home deemed legitimate.
- Rather than penning a simplified reunion, Chaudhury exploits the possibilities of third person omniscient narration so that he can show not only the mixed reactions of her relatives, but also the persisting doubts and ambivalent attitude of that main character.
- Sabita is caught between the affection that should prevail in the private sphere and the adverse impact of her past in the public one.
- Sabita is aware that “so many changes had occurred within this short span” (2008a: 339) of one year and a half, making it impossible to come full circle after undergoing a deeply traumatic experience.

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- During her abduction, Sabita was overwhelmed by melancholy for “her father, mother, brother and sister” (339).
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- The ponderings of Sabita arouse multiple feelings until she is exposed to the guilt that springs from failing to comply with social dictates: “Maybe they had even forgotten the dark stain of dishonour that had fallen on the otherwise untainted reputation of their family lineage” (339).
- Birth of the baby makes her feel ambivalent because that “unwanted and unwelcome child, not born out of love and affection, a mere product of hate and animosity” still is “her own flesh and blood”(340).

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- The insistence of the mother to wash Sabita throughout the story loses its anecdotal nature once her ulterior motives come to light. Additionally, religious and social beliefs—although generally unspecified—prevail for a woman who displays clear generational differences with descendants who do not share such a deeply-rooted idea of “cleanliness.”
- The mother seeks purification through her actions, which takes back Sabita to her traumatic past indefinitely. The worst punishment comes from the words that construct her as an outcast in her own home.
- The restoration of abducted women can only be effective on a geographical level, never on an emotional one; the combination of politics, faith and traumas is irreversible and hinders any possible demonstration of affection, whether bodily or verbal.

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- Chaudhury's short stories encapsulate some of the most conspicuous characteristics of what abduction and its subsequent trauma meant for women.
- Sabita's past is secondary to the variables that come into play after their return, which proves that there is no such thing as a single story when it comes to abducted women.

Thank You

