Sovereign Subject: Ray's Apu

The First Decade of Independence

It can be argued that the national movement, as it 'demobilizes' itself, hands over the task of cultural transformation to the state, enjoining artists to cooperate with its new institutional structure. Further, that artists, like their intellectual counterparts, perpetrate a set of self-deceptions during the period of transition to a national state; that they can be seen to use a kind of ethnic identification with extant (and idealized) traditions while gaining the upper hand through a rational–liberal discourse which is the basis of actual economic and social power in their society. An overlapping projection of (past) authenticity and (future) progress provides a formula for a democratic impulse, but it may be at the cost of the very people on whose behalf freedom was won. Both aspects of the projection have a euphoric dimension that obscures the present subaltern identity of the people in question.

Intellectuals 'always face the dilemma of choosing between a "westernizing" and a *narodnik* tendency', Ernest Gellner says,

> but the dilemma is quite spurious: ultimately the movements invariably contain both elements, a genuine modernism and a more or less spurious concern for local culture. By the twentieth century, the dilemma hardly bothers anyone: the philosopher kings of the underdeveloped world, all act as westernizers and all talk like *narodniks*.[1]

In Nehru's effort to situate nationalism within the domain of state ideology there was, as we know, a concerted effort to engage in planned development There was an attempt to create a new framework of institutions to embody the 'spirit of the age': humanism, science, progress, and their synonym, modernity. Partha Chatterjee calls it a 'statist utopia'.[3] Even a cursory glance at the public institutions set

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This essay was first presented at a conference, The First Decade of Indian Independence: 1947–1957, organized by the Centre for Contemporary Studies, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, St Anthony's College, Oxford University, and Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Texas at Austin, and held at all the three venues, in 1990. An earlier version was published under the title 'Cultural Creativity in the First Decade: The Example of Satyajit Ray', in *Journal of Arts & Ideas*, Nos. 23–24, January 1993. It also appeared in *Mapping Histories: Essays in Honour of Ravinder Kumar*, Tulika, Delhi, 2000.

up for promoting the arts after independence reveals that the cultural policy favoured a centralized and integrationist functioning.[4]

Culture was sought to be institutionalized precisely in order to carry out the overall mandate of modernization. In fact this institutionalizing process was conceived of as a way of disentangling the modern from the nationalist polemic. The latter had often to speak in the name of tradition even if it covertly strengthened the desire for the modern. While the national struggle had attempted to simulate a civilizational quest, the national state was bound to privilege culture as a means of cohering contemporaneity. In fact it would privilege culture above art as well, precisely because the intrepid claims of art always exceed, or subvert, even the more progressive rhetoric of institutionalized culture.

In India, as in other postcolonial countries (Mexico for example), artists have taken this institutional support for granted, nurtured as they have been throughout the anti-imperialist struggle on the idea of a benign national state. The nation's artists are provided with a sanctioned space in which they struggle with and resolve the riddles of language and sovereignty. For their part the artists seem to assume, even unconsciously perhaps, their responsibility to decode these terms and reconstitute them in what would be a national/modern art. By the same logic Indian artists, while testing the existential implications of the modern in the context of the nation, have been facilitated by state patronage to gain a metropolitan identity.

If we extend the argument about the consequence of what has been called, after Antonio Gramsci, the 'passive revolution'[5] to analogous developments in the realm of contemporary arts, we find that Indian modernism has developed without an avantgarde. A modernism without disjunctures is at best a reformist modernism. The very liberalism of the state absolves the left of confrontational initiatives on the cultural front. Similarly, the very capacity of newly independent India to resist up to a point the cultural pressures of the cold war era makes it less imperative for artists to devise the kind of combative aesthetic that will pose a challenge to the Euro–American avantgarde. We know that cinema, literature and the visual arts in Latin America have revolutionized the very forms of the modern they inherited from old and new colonialisms. Whether this derives from a particular kind of civilizational legacy, from the politics of liberalism adopted by the Indian state, or from peculiar accommodations made by the Indian middle-class intelligentsia when it moved from colonial to independent status, Indian artists have tended to avoid radical encounters with contemporary history.

All the same there is nothing to be gained from the kind of cynicism that Ernest Gellner for example uses to designate culture in the postcolonial countries. Even if art practice is ostensibly harnessed to the operation of the ideology and cultural policy of the new national state, creative practice is usually heterodox. There is a certain rebellion and also a dissembling radicalism among artists. Quite often there

may be utopian formulations or, on the other hand, subversive symbols that have political import. Complemented by even an episodic intransigence on the political front, it is enough to confound generalized theses on politics and culture.

Cultural Creativity

It is worth recalling that in Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan the romantic section of the nationalist elite led by the poet himself had encouraged an idealized aristocratic–folk paradigm for propagating a universal culture. The Santiniketan ideology in the practice of the arts was anti-industrial; with its strong craft orientation it was also obviously antiurban and emphasized environmental, ecological concerns.[6] Its vocational definition of the artist favoured a guru–shishya etiquette where the student idealized the master (Rabindranath was Gurudev, Nandalal Bose was the incontrovertible 'master moshai'). It abhorred the professional artist who was seen to demean himself by resort to the market. The modern was treated as the troubled feature of something like a civilizational project to which India, as part of the orient, would contribute its unique dynamic. This was the agenda of Benodebehari Mukherjee and Ramkinkar Baij. Indeed it was this indigenous romanticism combined with the canonical aesthetic of Ananda Coomaraswamy and the artisanal basis of Gandhian ideology which gave us the contours of a nationalist cultural discourse in the area of the arts. With the later alumni the aristocratic mentality of Tagore vanished. It had been transfigured already by the tribal persona of Ramkinkar Baij; now K.G. Subramanyan opted in favour of a transaction with the popular to arrive, through a series of modernist mediations, at a strategic notion of the contemporary.

By 1947 the course of Indian art was set *away* from Santiniketan. But if this phase of national culture was left behind in the irreversible process of post-independence modernization, the very abandonment gave rise to a permanent nostalgia for indigenist life-forms. It also led to a project for creative compensation fulfilled by an array of invented traditions.

What also got sidestepped with the advent of independence was the experiment of the cultural front of the communist movement, the most important aspect of which was of course the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association (IPTA).[7] This left another form of nostalgia, even a fierce regret, which led in turn to some major statements in art. It characterized for example the self-reflexive form of Ritwik Ghatak's cinema: the loss of a radical dream is actually thematized in his *Komal Gandhar* (1961) and *Jukti Takko ar Gappo* (1974). Ghatak, positioning himself to go beyond the so-called intermediate phase of bourgeois democratic culture, claimed modernism to be part of a logic beyond reform; indeed he positioned the logic of twentieth-century revolutionary socialism against reformist modernism. In this somewhat voluntarist exercise he provided the impetus, rather like the unorthodox genius D.D. Kosambi,[8] to see Indian tradition turned inside out, to question the

assumptions about myth and reality, to problematize the nurturing potential of perennial symbols by confronting them with a historically shaped subjectivity. Precisely from this point of view Ghatak, a product of IPTA, would reject the overdetermination of the aesthetic. He would pitch his expressional ambiguities beyond the westernizing/narodnik paradigm and give the interrogative mode its political edge in the contemporary.

The pan-Asian revivalism of Santiniketan as well as the people's movement of IPTA turned out to be lost causes in postindependence India. We therefore have to resume investigation of an apparently nonideological or liberal aesthetic. Clearly, it is within this discourse that Satyajit Ray's redemptive promise in the realist genre is to be located. And though this will be the basis of the critique as well—that is, his unproblematized faith in the self-emancipation of the Indian (or more precisely, of the emergent Indian middle-class) consciousness—it is because of its redemptive promise that *Pather Panchali* (1955) gains an emblematic place in the first decade of independence. Liberal discourse, privileging a realist genre with its rationally conceived possibilities of transcendence, gives *Pather Panchali* and the Apu trilogy their seminal significance in postindependence India.

Modernizing Project

Ray's choice of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's novels *Pather Panchali* (1928) and *Aparajito* (1931),[9] his choice of a story—set some time in the early years of the twentieth century—of the growth, travail and transformation of a young brahmin boy in the mainstream of the modern, has obvious allegorical value. The footsteps of the brahmin boy mark the transition of an impoverished but literate and gracefully poised culture of perennial India, as also the transition of 'the people' towards a subliminally perceived destiny. Narrativized with appropriate pathos, each discovery of the boy is accompanied by loss and the discovered self carries the weight of familial and social responsibility. This is a responsibility, however, that is displaced in various registers of consciousness, dodged and deferred through various stages of life. This is a story about the romance of the self and the world in the heart of Apu who passes through urban anomie like a sleepwalker, and who gains in the balanced aesthetic of Ray's cinema a life that will stand testimony as a realist document for numerous lives-in-the-making.

I will argue that by virtue of its universal success *Pather Panchali* confirmed that an Indian cultural creativity was at work to link civilizational memory with the sense of sovereignty that independence brings. There was in the making and receiving of *Pather Panchali* a hope that this cultural creativity would overcome the painful alienation of the colonial experience by turning it into a rite of passage to modernity. The colonial experience could then be marked with a before and an after: the before would be designated in terms of memory, or more properly as civilizational

plenitude that yields the great imaginary. The present would move on to the destined point of arrival where the process of self-reckoning with otherness and authority, which is to say the symbolic order, has been tackled. Reality, contemporary reality, would now surface, materially replete, from its nourishing matrix. But it would also be indelibly printed with the structures of rationality gained at the collective level in the struggle for independence and revealed in the new national formation.

Pather Panchali served to provide a gloss on the civilizational trauma caused by progress; it sublimated (and displaced) the threat of modernization into a dream of autonomy. And it fulfilled the need for a newly self-regarding middle-class intelligentsia to channel its conscience. *Pather Panchali* became in the process something akin to an ethnographic allegory (built on a promise of plenitude) which denies and even seemingly undermines the politicality of a national formation (an artifice for social authority), but in fact served by deliberate default as a national allegory. That default may be seen as a way of reading one thing for another, a structure of narration corresponding to a structure of feeling. In a reticently existential film sovereignty corresponded to what one may call the political unconscious of the expressly conscious artist in postindependence India. It led 'logically' to a narrativization of the self via the nation—the most determining political paradigm delivered to the modern consciousness by the nineteenth century. Therein the nation tends to appear less as a societal struggle and more as an evolutionary trace in the consciousness, which is precisely the paradox at the heart of such a discovering mission.

The Apu trilogy is replete with symbols of colonial India in which it is temporally placed, but the colonial (like the national) consciousness is not really addressed. The village as a pristine community of precolonial India is linked directly with the sense of the historical present, Ray's own contemporary India, where the nation is the determining but invisible trajectory in the wake of which the individual can at last be valorized.

Ray's National Status

It is usual to argue that Satyajit Ray[10] belongs naturally to the Bengal heritage, beginning with the rationalized ethics of the Bengal 'renaissance' through the liberal strand of the Brahmo Samaj to which his own family belonged *(Illus. 1, 2, 3)*. And to the literary and artistic traditions reposed in Rabindranath Tagore.[11] Ray is indeed a literary filmmaker in that the developed conventions of the Bengali novel as well as its particular set of emancipatory themes are his basic material. His choice of Bibhutibhushan's novel *Pather Panchali* and its sequel *Aparajito*, which encompassed the environmental structure of the Bengali village and the destinies that ensued from it—this choice itself was significant in that it gave him, through its picaresque mode, the secular space for his succinct and contemporary narrative on film *(Illus. 4)*.

I will argue that it is the ethics of his own version of realist cinema as this


1 Upendrakisore Ray: grandfather


2 Sukumar Ray: father


3 Satyajit Ray at age eleven, 1932

is internationally received which makes Ray India's emblematic *national* artist in the decade after independence. At the biographical level the actual inscription within national culture of his first film *Pather Panchali* (1955), followed by *Aparajito* (1956) and *Apur Sansar* (1959), makes of itself a runaway story. With all the difficulties of finance Ray faced during the three years he spent making *Pather Panchali*, it was finally the West Bengal government, on the personal recommendation of the chief minister Dr B.C. Roy, that bailed the film out. No one, however, knew very much about why they were supporting the project and found justification in it being a kind of documentary. The money was granted from the account of a rural upliftment programme of the government because the film was called 'The Song of the Little Road'!

Jawaharlal Nehru had to intervene to allow the film to circulate abroad as there were objections from Indian diplomatic missions that it was too stark and pessimistic.[12] It had a prestigious opening, first at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1955)[13] and then at Cannes (1956), where it won an award for the 'best human document'. In 1957 *Aparajito* won the Golden Lion in Venice and this confirmed Ray's international reputation. *Pather Panchali* opened commercially in London (1957) and then again in New York (1958), where it achieved huge popularity.[14] All of this was superimposed on the quick success of the film in Calcutta itself with high praise from Ray's compatriots everywhere. Thus traversing regional/national/international contexts, *Pather Panchali* became independent India's gift to the confluence of world cultures. 'Each race contributes something essential to the world's civilization in the course of its self-expression', Marie Seton quotes Coomaraswamy from the *Dance of Siva* at the head of her biography of Satyajit Ray.[15]

On seeing *Pather Panchali* and *Aparajito* Stanley Kauffman wrote that he believed Ray was determined to preserve the truth about his people and that, paraphrasing James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, he was 'forging in the smithy of his heart the uncreated conscience of his race'.[16] The Indian intelligentsia too held it in similar

4 Outdoor shooting of *Pather Panchali*: Satyajit Ray with film crew and actors. Subrata Mitra and Bansi Chandragupta are behind him.

regard and in terms that were not dissimilar. On the one hand it was seen as a testimony of individual conscience, and on the other as a civilizational expression mediated by some form of 'racial' memory, producing symbols with contemporary aesthetic affect. This was the cultural discourse that the Apu trilogy enriched—a romantic, even orientalist discourse, shared by resurgent nationalities of the east in the first decades of this century with Coomaraswamy and Tagore as its key figures.

Tagore and Santiniketan

It is well known that it was from Rabindranath Tagore, a friend of the family and a lifelong inspiration, that Ray derived his sustaining aesthetic;[17] the need in particular to test contemporary Indian art forms on the simultaneous value of the *indigenous* and the *universal*—euphemisms in Ray's case for the regional and the international. In this sense Ray can be seen as completing India's civilizational quest as this had been articulated in renascent terms since the nineteenth century. Here, almost by deliberate default, the question of national culture was overwhelmed by preferred metaphors of perenniality.

But then *Pather Panchali* and the Apu trilogy as a cycle can also be seen as answering, in some unprecedented sense, a contemporary and most immediate need for a suitable visual solution to the question of representing everyday life in India *(Illus. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10)*. The perennial and the everyday: this was Ray's project. Ray imbibed this under the tutelage of Nandalal Bose and Benodebehari Mukherjee during his student days at Santiniketan's Kala Bhavana.[18]

In this sense, then, Ray was not only completing a nineteenth-century project, he was bringing two of its most distinguished cultural products across the threshold into realism: the Bengali novel in its own version of a *bildungsroman* and the pictorial language of the Bengal School, but more specifically the Santiniketan artists whose ambient imagery aspires to a kind of oriental naturalism. Now, as a filmmaker, he seemed to resolve with exemplary economy the question of image,

5–10 Apu's passage
Above: 5 Aunt Indir (Chunibala Devi) rocks baby Apu to sleep (*Pather Panchali*).
Middle: 6 Apu (Subir Banerjee) gets ready for school: his sister Durga (Uma Das Gupta) combs his hair, his mother Sarbojaya (Karuna Banerjee) tucks in his dhoti (*Pather Panchali*).
Below: 7 Apu (Pinaki Sen Gupta) learns to perform rites as a priest after his father's death (*Aparajito*)

Above: 8 Apu (Smaran Ghosal) as an adolescent schoolboy (*Aparajito*). Middle: 9 Apu (Soumitra Chatterjee) in his rented room in Calcutta, playing the flute (*Apur Sansar*). Below: 10 Apu's bride Aparna (Sharmila Tagore) enters his Calcutta flat (*Apur Sansar*)

11–14 Social encounters in the everyday
Above: 11 The grocer-schoolmaster (Tulsi Chakravarty) with customers and a punished schoolboy (*Pather Panchali*). Below: 12 Durga and friends at Ranu's wedding watch fascinatedly as a woman applies *alta* on the bride's feet (*Pather Panchali*)

iconography and pictorial narrative—questions pending precisely since the Santiniketan project wound down in the 1950s.

Satyajit Ray's relationship to the indigenous filmmaking tradition of India, a rich and variegated tradition nearly as old as film history itself, is an area still to be properly examined. It should reveal a third and perhaps surprising trajectory running through his cultural formation. Here I want only to note that there is at work a conflation of the virtue of the camera lens (*objectif* in French) and the rest of the elaborate apparatus that goes into producing the moving image, with the convention, the aesthetic, the ideology and the norm of realism. This is not the place for a critical debate on the realist genre in cinema, but it is worth remembering that this conflation

Above: 13 Aparna's mother shields her daughter from marriage to an insane man: 'Who are you giving your daughter away to?', she asks her husband (*Apur Sansar*). Below: 14 Apu's friend Pulu (Swapan Mukherjee) asks Apu to marry his cousin Aparna to save family honour (*Apur Sansar*)

initiates the viewer into a magical pact with the real whereby s/he comes to believe that the paradoxes of fantasy and perhaps even historical contradictions can at the least be visualized. The viewer moreover is led to believe that by virtue of this privileged participation in an inviolate perceptual model, a pristine cognition is also as if at hand and possibly also a universally valid resolution between nature and culture.

Ray is valorized for authenticating, in so contemporary a medium as film but yet with a commitment to the conscience of his 'race', a reforming will that befits the prevailing human conditions in India *(Illus. 11, 12, 13, 14)*. He is also believed to have authenticated with an aesthetic modesty, the progressive aspirations of the liberal middle class. For the Apu trilogy enacts with its 'poverty of means' the painful entry of

a traditional society into the historical process. It replays the rhythm of that transformation in the very narrative mode of the three films while also confirming the transcendent imagination of the author–artist: Apu, the hero of the novel and the film, is also a writer. The conspicuously placed cathartic moments of the Apu trilogy mark a patient pace and then grant the individual his process of becoming. For Apu outpaces by a finely tuned voluntarism the ritual rites of collective survival, to take his unique place in the wide world.

Death and Desire

Apu's material world is enlivened by seasonal cycles, kinship networks, children's games, adult rituals. Thus 'naturalized', simple episodes (and the film is made up of these carefully edited episodes) turn into absolutes that prefigure the fixed markers of human life: birth and death. But if all this is seen as the unmotivated truth of collective life, the very texture of a community, Satyajit Ray on his own part seems to press no strong structure on the film.

Twenty years after the film was made Akira Kurosawa,[19] the Japanese filmmaker, is quoted to have said:

> It is the kind of film that flows with the serenity and nobility of a big river. . . . People are born, live out their lives, and then

15–18 Death in the family
From top to bottom: 15 Sister's death: Sarbojaya embraces her dying daughter Durga (*Pather Panchali*). 16 Father's death: Apu helps Sarbojaya raise the dying Harihar (Kanu Banerjee) so that he may sip *gangajal* (*Aparajito*). 17 Mother's death: Nirupama (Sudipta Roy) finds an ill and dying Sarbojaya sitting under a tree (*Aparajito*). 18 Wife's death: Apu receives news from Aparna's natal home of her death during childbirth (*Apur Sansar*)

accept their deaths. Without the least effort and without any jerks Ray paints his picture but its effect on the audience is to stir up deep passions. There is nothing irrelevant or haphazard in his cinematographic technique. In that lies the secret of its excellence.[20]

Though *Pather Panchali* is manifestly episodic, actual historical discontinuity, like the experience of the colonial/national, remains an invisible feature. One has instead the fantasy of overarching continuity—from civilizational origins to the ambiguously periodized historical present. Thus the riverine metaphor, and the reception of *Pather Panchali* as a graciously easy film. But of course this is a typically realist ruse: the apparent absence of structure, of structural devices. By the time the Apu trilogy is complete one is aware of a subliminal grid placed on the natural flow of life so that it comes to be marked and narrativized as destiny.

The narrative of the trilogy is marked, for instance, by a recurring motif of death: the death of Apu's sister Durga, the death of his father and mother, and the death of his beloved wife Aparna *(Illus. 15, 16, 17, 18)*. The death theme is worked out in the actual cinematic sequence with complete predictability, the editing of shots around the event signal separation/pain/loneliness and at the end, on Aparna's death, tragic

19–22 Bonds of affection
From top to bottom:19 Nature's child: Durga with a calf (*Pather Panchali*). 20 The lovers: Apu teaches Aparna English (*Apur Sansar*). 21 City friends: banter between Pulu and Apu (*Apur Sansar*). 22 Father and son: Apu claims Kajal (Aloke Chakravarty), his son by Aparna, and bears him away (*Apur Sansar*)

alienation. There is a metonymic simplicity, a part-to-whole relationship of easy relay in the way life's great transitions are indicated. It is as if this loss-inducing society (colonial society?) is to be overcome by a philosophic acquiescence which is in turn overcome by a larger historical motif of survival *(Illus. 19, 20, 21, 22)*.

Paradoxically, the deaths accelerate Apu's determined evolution. Indeed there is a flamelike sense of self that grows steadily as Apu encounters life and death and life again, and the flame is like the gleaming individuality that has been on the anvil in bourgeois literature since the nineteenth century. If separation by death sustains the romantic motif of Apu's outward journey his persistent departures make him ever more the modern exile. It is Ray's own high modernity that helps him portray Apu's introspective individuality so gracefully. Finding himself a suitable mirror image in the sanguine, clear-eyed persona of the actor Soumitra Chatterjee, he portrays the chaste urbanity of the young man, his vulnerability as he is poised on the brink of liberation, and his *jouissance* as well. The terms of this idealization are predictable: the bohemian outsider within bourgeois contexts, the garret artist who will indulge himself in grand speech and creative reverie at the cost of economic gain, the poet protecting himself from reification in an indifferent city.

If this idealization of the metropolitan artist seems like vengeance for his wild sister Durga who is sacrificed to the elements in the ancestral village, it also serves as the price of selfhood in an anthropological sense—whereby indeed some of the pain of the sacrifice can be redeemed. For Durga's zest is the primitive version of the almost mystical lover that Apu is in the last part of the trilogy, when he has lost his wife as well. Then the story of a sovereign self comes full circle. He rescues his little son stalking some imaginary game in the mock-forest of his mother's ancestral home, and when he carries his son away on his shoulders the relentless succession of deaths, of loss and degradation, has been broken. We know that Apu's own selfhood is now firmly positioned vis-a-vis a future. The spoken word hinged on doubt characterizes the destinal narrative, but the final shot of *Apur Sansar*, the son perched on the father's shoulders, offers an archetypal image of doubling. The carefully wrought protagonist enters another regenerating cycle working more consciously towards enlightened desire: a typical Ray motif.

Spatial Dimensions of the Narrative

Ray transforms the harmonic structure of the novel by inscribing and then submerging a synchronous grid of life's chores. Though immured in destiny, Apu weaves in and out of the grid and in the end stretches back to repeat himself through his son, weaving another more developed pattern. Thus the narration is spatialized; thus too little Apu in all his phenomenal encounters can always gain a threshold. Ray demonstrates this in *Pather Panchali* in the way every occasion for infantile desire throws up a prospect.

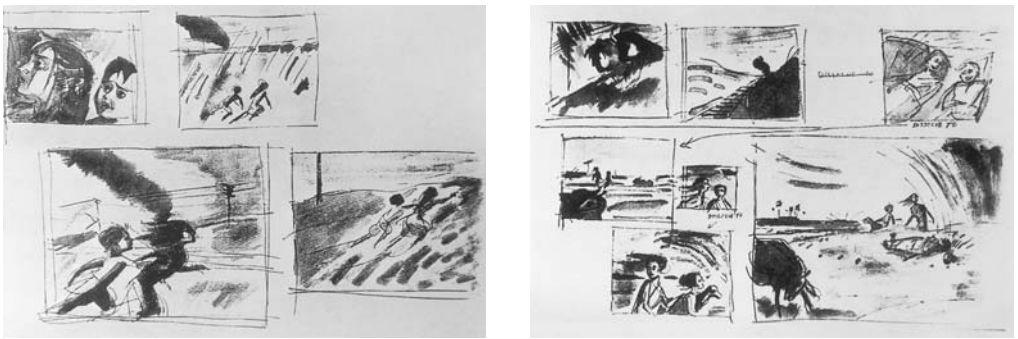
23 Apu gazes intently (*Pather Panchali*)

In Nischindipur Durga is the little dryad who, with aunt Indir the benign witch, alleviates poverty by thieving the village harvest of fruit. Together they create a sense of pleasure against Durga's parents' persistent sense of privation. Durga and aunt Indir die in *Pather Panchali,* both wanting, desiring. The father and the mother die in the second film, *Aparajito*, entirely evacuated of desire. This symmetry gives Apu, who probably sees himself as neither poor nor rich, his turn for poetic manoeuvre. In the last film, *Apur Sansar*, he finally unlocks the grid—the balanced stasis of peasant life—and emerges as the solitary wayfinder magnetized by the horizon.

Like Apu's, the viewer's gaze is relieved by the horizons set before every turn of event *(Illus. 23)*. Ray's sequencing of perspectival shots, his overall editing of space, which is to say the narrative inscription of space, produces real and invisible horizons ranged in several registers to facilitate exit. Nor is this entire achievement a formal affair. The mise-en-scene of the film is crucial. It is well known that Ray insisted on shooting *Pather Panchali* out of doors in the countryside to achieve the 'true' naturalism that was preferred by Jean Renoir and the Italian neorealists whom he so admired. Not unusual in the west, this was a brave decision for Ray as he was more or less a novice without funds at the start of the project. The result of this enterprise was anyhow different from Renoir and the Italians in that with Ray nature indexed, even perhaps fetishistically signified, his commitment to an idealized reality. We will see how it is in nature, in actual space marked by his tracking camera, that he accomplished his revelatory passage into the real.

Remember the famous scene in *Pather Panchali* of the two children, Durga and Apu, in the *kash* field beyond the village, near the railway line *(Illus. 24, 25)*. This is the first sequence Ray shot of the film; this is where he demonstrates naively, superbly, how cinema can accomplish an immanence of the concrete by a delicately edited figure-ground relationship. He shows how natural elements are synchronized to produce a prefiguration of destiny; how he can overcome pragmatically discrete notions of nature and history, and in an eminently spatial encounter, gain an *image* of both at once.

The children play hide-and-seek in the plumed grass, they put their ear to the strange reverberations of the telegraph poles, and then seeing for the first time the long imagined train appear on the horizon, they run towards it, Apu far in the lead. It advances like a metal dragon thundering across the landscape only to disappear swiftly leaving a trail of black cloud *(Illus. 26, 27, 28, 29, 30)*. How often Indian filmmakers



24–25 From Ray's sketchbook: wash drawings of possible film scenarios for *Pather Panchali*, sketched in the manner of comics

have used the train to cut up framed space and dislocate time, creating in the wake of its disappearance primitivist nostalgia, totemic fear, sheer anticipation. But in *Pather Panchali* the train produces the kind of epiphany Ray is peculiarly capable of conjuring, an epiphany springing from a simple mise-en-scene and a stereotypical symbol. There it is, the train, invoking rustic, childish wonder and turning into the paradoxical symbol of imposed yet desired modernization. There it is, the classic cinematic miracle of the train, transposed on to the landscape in such a way that nature itself seems to herald history. And Apu witnesses this open-mouthed until the camera, now on the near side of the train, shows the speeding hulk cut across his little body, leaving him momentously and forever charged.

It is at this point that Apu first comes into his own. Here he recognizes his yearning, in the thrumming of the poles and in the silence preceding the apparition of the train. Still in thrall of his sister, he finds a signal for becoming in the *passage* of the train and advances to take responsibility, as far as possible, for his own destiny. Ray invokes a mesmeric potency in nature to gain the reality effect. Apu first tarries in the landscape and then flies like an arrow in the heart of time, signifying in both movements that here, at this spot, the child's soul and the phenomenal world fuse and become lucid, self-revealing. This is also Ray's own realization, in terms of a perfectly chosen mise-en-scene, of cinema's privileged relation to phenomenological veracity.

But equally in this early sequence Ray is at pains to translate his sense of the real so that it might, even given the epiphany, remain on the right side of realism. Everything that follows this scene in the *kash* field will build up to Durga's death, giving her a permanence of being and thereby a trace of the iconographical memory that illuminates her name. And yet at the end of *Pather Panchali* when Durga is dead and the bereaved family prepares to leave the village of Nischindipur with its destroyed ancestral home, the otherwise impractical poet–priest, Apu's father Harihar Roy, declares that *this must sometimes be done*. That departure is necessary. Moreover, while the last shot of the family departing in the bullock-cart recalls the almost ubiquitous melodramatic conventions of Indian cinema (which coincide with and





26–30 The *kash* field. Above left: 26 Durga and Apu hear a mysterious hum (*Pather Panchali*). Above right: 27. Apu puts his ear to the electric pole (*Pather Panchali*). Middle left: 28 Durga is screened by *kash* flowers (*Pather Panchali*). Middle right: 29 Apu runs towards the train (*Pather Panchali*). Below: 30 The train with a plume of smoke appears on the horizon (*Pather Panchali*)

sometimes assimilate what one may call Indian realism: recall similar scenes in *Devdas* and *Do Bigha Zameen*), in *Pather Panchali* it is the steady gaze of the *little* protagonist that recognizes, however bleakly, the inward journey of his life.

Having signalled the crossing over of the hero in *Pather Panchali*, having indicated Apu gently pushing fate into a space for becoming, in the next film, *Aparajito*, Ray puts tradition itself in the balance. He puts the idea of tradition as well as its generic modes of the mystical and the melodramatic in balance with the self-creating subject, the invisibly inscribed subject-in-history that is Apu.

The journey on which Apu thus embarks, moving from Nischindipur to Benares to Calcutta and then possibly to some unknown shore, illustrates precisely like the neorealism of Italian provenance the journey that countless young men will make in India. It does so in a way that allows to be heard, like a faint but insistently repeated undertone, the rhythm of their distant figuration. It does so in a way that allows to be seen the remote emergence of these countless young men in a narrative evocation of the national story. This is what makes the Apu trilogy something of an allegory—except that if the allegory at the national level has the express purpose of exorcising superstition so as to replace it with necessity (specifically economic necessity), there is in the novel and equally in the film a further transcending step. Apu rejects the supposed perenniality of village life; he abandons the rigours of his brahmin identity but also the bondage of labour in the city, so that on the realm of necessity is mounted an ordering principle of freedom.

The Apu trilogy, then, has two overlying motifs, one devolving and the other evolving. If the first motif is a kind of sublime fatalism, the second involves the rites of passage for a modernizing young adult. Ray establishes a perfect synchrony in these two primary motifs, pivoting them on childhood adventure but seeing them prefigure the demonstrably allegorical extension to Apu's quest for knowledge and sovereignty. What I shall go on to argue is that this notion of freedom itself may produce a condition of hypostasis.

Secular Imagery

'With apparent formlessness *Pather Panchali* traces the great design of living', Lindsay Anderson said at the time of the Cannes award in 1956, adding that Ray does this while giving the impression that 'he has gone down on his knees in the dust' and 'worked with complete humility'.[21] On another occasion, as if pressing the point, Ray commented: 'I direct my films in harmony with the rhythm of human breathing.'[22]

Nearness and distance are almost as if metrically composed and then intoned by the breathing life of forms. Ray places much of his work within the formal lyric mode. At the heart of the lyric is the desire for the numen, or to put it the other way round, the lyrical is an expression of the numinous and thereby haloed. Even the

Above: 31 Aunt Indir: inquisitive, gaping (*Pather Panchali*). Below: 32 Durga holds a guava to the old aunt's nose: a shared moment of childish greed (*Pather Panchali*)

occasional irony within the lyric mode must work itself around the numen and not subvert it. For that very reason I should like to see the numen residing first and foremost in the ancient aunt Indir who is, for all her little wickednesses and folly, treated with utmost tenderness.[23] She is numinous because she is the last breath, the ultimate waif of traditional society. Here is also the irony and the very mischief in it turns into grace because the errant hag's breath goes out just like that, suffusing the phenomenal world with unfinished desire. But then Indir is compressed into the soul of the younger waif Durga, whose breath is high with the passion of pure childish greed. Free from accretions, it wafts across the village ponds and groves. Taken together in intimate moments of eating and laughing, these two give us the confirmed image of the

33 Durga dances ecstatically in the monsoon rain (*Pather Panchali*)

numinous in *Pather Panchali (Illus. 31, 32)*. Then at the end of the film there is something like an apotheosis. Soon after the old aunt dies Durga dances ecstatically in the torrential monsoon rain for all the world like a mad little demon. Or an adolescent goddess. When she dies she is reclaimed by the stormy night. And yet Durga is not really canonized; indeed she is nearly forgotten as the narrative proceeds and she leaves behind only a melancholy resonance, that small *excess* of unfinished desire which is the very attribute of lyric naturalism *(Illus. 33)*.

In all this Ray takes his cue from his immediate literary sources, Rabindranath of course, and Bibhutibhushan who may have had a less developed notion of generic options in literature but who could, as we see, elicit from material details a fully experiential world. Ray follows Bibhutibhushan in his reproduction of splendid imagery that just stops short, deliberately, of iconographical complexities. In fact he even inverts the icon, as in the old aunt, and yet retains the numinous as simply a breathing figure imaged forth with cinematic persistence.

Ray relies on a certain romanticist faith in the image as such: the image as against symbol and icon. I have already spoken about Ray's cinematic image with its phenomenological veracity, its breathing form and numinous grace; the image in more generic terms as a focus of his lyric naturalism. I should now like to argue how, given Ray's liberal and reformist ethics, this kind of image is imbued with a secular sensibility. By disallowing any mythic overload or excessive condensation or

metaphorical density to develop in the imagery, that is to say by sustaining a lean aesthetic, he strengthens its realist–modernist features. Ray places himself modestly but firmly at the juncture where romantic reverie meets with realist conscience to find formal solutions. Then, desaturating the image and allowing an ironic retake on its inescapable symbologies, he makes a gracious transition to the aesthetic of modernism. Ray offers a post-Chekhovian sleight-of-hand that brings him close to an ebullient 'realist' like Jean Renoir.[24] Also to Francois Truffaut who in turn spans Hitchcock/Hollywood and the vanguard formalism of the French 'new wave'. Ray is sophisticated, playful, witty, and for all the burden he carries in representing India, he is a cosmopolitan filmmaker.

Ray is of course quite easily situated in film lineage. I am referring to the composite, broadly realist movement in cinema signalled by Renoir (to whom Ray apprenticed himself when he came to India in 1949 to make his film *The River*) and theorized by Andre Bazin, the philosopher–critic of existential persuasion.[25] He is closer to the Italian Vittorio De Sica whose lasting intervention in cinema history via *Bicycle Thieves* (1947) influenced Indian filmmakers (Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zameen*, 1953, being the first evidence). With 'classical' Hollywood directors like John Ford as the baseline, Ray picks his way through several options, aligned to realism on the one hand and to the new wave on the other. Finally, however, he retracts from the logical extension of both tendencies, particularly the latter which while incorporating realism gives itself over to modernist surrealism (as in Luis Bunuel, Alain Resnais). Like the Japanese masters Kenzi Mizoguchi, Yasujiro Ozu and Kurosawa, he finds a cultural location from where he can clarify, or even rigorously demystify, the means of representation. He offers the belief that art lends transparency to history and arrives at a near-classical repose.

Ray's somewhat dissembling faith that cinematic representation in the realist genre lends transparency to history itself is complemented by his remarkable achievement in rescuing and reinforcing the secular image within his own culture. And so we return him to the tradition of the modern within this culture—its quasi-liberal ideology underwritten by a Brahmo sensibility which seeks to infuse western values within an indigenous civilizational ethic, however that may be designated (or as a matter of fact precisely as it is designated by the poet–philosopher Rabindranath). Thus individual emancipation as in the bourgeois ethos can be translated into a drive for selfhood within a purposefully interpreted vedantic logic and delivered, twice mediated, to the contemporary. Through this process of translation you receive from Ray, as also from Rabindranath, his social and cultural contribution in the form of an eminently lucid reflection on the process of 'becoming' via the very vicissitudes of everyday life. Here is a double paradigm: the heterodox values of modernity set within civilizational beliefs (such as the spiritual propensity implied by the notion of *samskaras*). Within this complex structure of values Ray is circumspect. He draws in

clear, firm, but delimited contours, secular figures that are consonant with the new social formation of contemporary India.

Even as he completes his first film on a shoestring budget he proposes through its precise figuration to clean out iconographical fuzziness and correct civilizational sloth. He provides a 'pure' narrative in a mise-en-scene that is, in the Bazinian sense, the arena of lived life. Here the protagonists may not, from a necessary sense of irony or from tragic purpose, command the universe, but they see the narrative through with the dignity of struggle *(Illus. 34, 35, 36, 37)*.

Authenticating the Modern

Bibhutibhushan's splendid novel is one among the narratives that are generically categorized as *bildungsroman*.[26] In its generic form it gives Ray the occasion to shape an elegant, allegorical tale wherein the claims of individual sovereignty and secular culture are raised. Thus, while there seems to be no overtly progressive ideology that motivates *Pather Panchali*, nor even the Apu trilogy as a whole, there is the inexorable process of growing up and knowing within the terms of modern society the truth, or rather the ethics, of survival. It is through this kind of subliminal politics that Ray inflects the historical legacy to which he belongs.

34–37 The struggles of life
From top to bottom: 34 Indir conducts her meagre chores (*Pather Panchali*). 35 Sarbojaya calls out to Indir leaving the house in a huff (*Pather Panchali*). 36 Harihar gasps for breath on the steps of a Benares *ghat* (*Aparajito*). 37 Apu prepares himself to meet his son for the first time (*Apur Sansar*)

Ray does not valorize historical change either in his early classics or later. Nor does he introduce narrative disjuncture whereby the unconscious may find its formal manifestations, a language and speech which interrogate historical change itself. In other words, Ray does not stake out the contemporary as a contested space for historical forces to act in—he simply lays the ground.

It should be remembered that his mentor Rabindranath Tagore had already problematized these issues in the early decades of the twentieth century. Consider the question of Hindu male militancy in his novel *Gora*; consider the high stakes he places on the creative spirit of his female protagonist, Charulata, in *Nashtanir*. In *Ghare Baire* Bimala literally acts out the turmoil of nationalism from her niche in the home. Ray gives these protagonists a vexed consciousness that detaches itself from civilizational determinates to engage with the more ambiguously placed promises of history.

Indeed it is somewhat inhibiting to Ray's position that in cultural discourse, as in particular forms of aesthetic resolution, Tagore has already bestowed so much more complex and even painfully contradictory meanings on self and subjectivity, on love, language, race, community, people and nation—on all those emancipatory epithets of the modern which derive from the double heritage of reason and romanticism. Ray, on the other hand, can only work with the deliberate use of anachronisms, as in his early films *Jalsaghar* (1958) and *Devi* (1960). The passing away of feudalism, for instance, is established through a negative denouement of a seamless tragedy. Historical insight is in this way elided in favour of an existential truth and cultural authenticity.

Ray is not only a prime exemplar of the authentic and authenticating artist, he lays to rest the vexed debates on tradition and modernity. I refer to these debates as they have proceeded from the Indian renaissance in the nineteenth century, debates engaged in by Tagore, Gandhi, and also Nehru beginning with the *Discovery of India*. For a society undergoing rapid change after independence authenticity becomes once again the redemptive sign—an illusory redemption even, but expressly functional in sustaining a national discourse. More specifically, the consolidated aspirations of the liberal middle class have to be fulfilled, and they need an art form that will emancipate them not only from the tradition/modernity debates but also from the ensuing bad conscience into which they are cornered by traditionalists and radicals alike. The middle class, favoured by the nation-state, need moreover a demonstrably secular and sufficiently classical (or classicized) art form; a 'high' art form to gain parity, via the national, with universal (international) cultural discourse.

Ray certainly gives his class an existential basis for authenticity. Deferred and even elided, the wager on the *contemporary* surfaces as a vestigial presence in the Apu trilogy. The contemporary becomes a pressure on the cinematic figuration of his narratives; it leaves traces which allow themselves to be read as secular, modern, yet

systemic enough to gain a classical profile. He does this, to reiterate in a sentence the argument that has run through the essay, by handling directly and to his advantage the relation between civilizational motives and historical affect. Letting the one and then the other outpace each other, he fills the 'ideal' role of an Indian artist within the progressive paradigm of the 'first decade'.[27]

Allegorical Account

We have already seen how the Apu trilogy touches a notion of authenticity that is existentially ascertainable. More specifically, it provides a measure of authorial credibility: a nonwestern artist in the best moment of his own historical self-regard, the moment of national independence, claiming individual sovereignty. I want to conclude by moving into the more vexed area of interpretation and suggest that the Apu trilogy is, and has been taken as, or perhaps should be taken as, a kind of *ethnographic allegory*.[28] It answers the continuing need of the liberal imagination, western as well as Indian, to comprehend 'otherness' on humanistically coeval terms. It answers the need to work out a system of equations within a cultural matrix that is finally, inevitably, universal and in that universality committed to a destinal narrative—inventing that term to mean at once destiny and destination, immanent life and a metanarrative that proxies for transcendence.

Ethnographic writing is allegorical, James Clifford says, at the level of its context: in what it says about cultures and their histories, and of its form: in what is implied by its mode of textualization.[29] He goes on to say that to shift focus from ideology to ethnographic allegory in readings of culture is to suggest that the more convincing and rich realistic portraits are, the more they serve as extended metaphors, patterns of associations that point to coherent theoretical/aesthetic/*moral* meaning.[30] Further, as a rhetorical trope 'allegory draws special attention to the narrative character of cultural representation, to the stories built into the representational process itself.'[31]

This is the point I want to stress: the allegoric/narrative character of cultural representation in a film like *Pather Panchali*. Representation interprets itself in the narrative of the film, it opens out moments of moral insight or, rather, categories of 'truth' (fictional, cinematic and social) that fulfil the most wide-ranging cultural expectation, beginning with the local and culminating in the national.

Ray decidedly belongs to an intellectual climate that respects what Clifford calls positivism, realism, romanticism[32]—nineteenth-century ingredients of twentieth-century cultural studies. But, as Clifford goes on to say, studies in rhetoric (understood in my argument to mean figures of expression and more precise linguistic decodings) have disrupted the assumption of 'presence' that underpinned the positivist–realist–romantic consensus. Meaning does not flow through seamless discourse nor does it emanate from it as numinous presence. Indeed the recognition of rhetorical moves in the quest for meaning has disrupted the inclination to valorize the

symbolic (underwritten by an elaborate realist project) over allegory.[33] And the doubts generated by this disruption help us to understand that culturalist/humanist allegories[34] stand behind the fiction of 'difference' deploying exotic symbols in aesthetic discourse, even as at one time spiritual explanations used to mobilize the interpretation of other cultures towards a norm of transcendent sameness. If most 'descriptions of others continue to assume and refer to elemental or transcendental levels of truth',[35] if there is a continuing need to establish through a nexus of symbologies, human similarities over and above cultural difference, then we can know that a definite elision is at work. 'This synchronic suspension effectively textualizes the other and gives the sense of reality not in temporal flux, not in the same ambiguous, moving, *historical* present',[36] but in retrospection that encourages the recovery of the other by way of a redemptive psychology.

Ray allows the protagonist of the Apu trilogy to *redeem himself*. He stands extra tall at the crossroads with his child on his shoulder at the end of the last film of the trilogy, *Apur Sansar.* But there is in the very courage of this verticality a break between the past and the future, and a deep-rooted regret at the alienated space of the present. This alienated space concretizes the sense of pervasive social fragmentation, the sense of a constant disruption of 'natural' relations. This, Clifford says, after Raymond Williams, is characteristic of a subjectivity inducted into city life and suffused with romantic nostalgia for a happier place elsewhere in the past, in the country.[37] The self cast loose from viable collective ties is an identity in search of wholeness; having internalized loss it embarks on an endless search for authenticity, a sign of wholeness which becomes by definition, however, a thing of the past—rural, primitive, childlike—accessible only as fiction and grasped at but from a stance of incomplete involvement. Thus there is a withdrawal from any full response to an existing society. 'Value is in the past, as a general retrospective condition, and in the present only as a particular and private sensibility, as individual moral action.'[38]

If Ray is part of the positivist–realist–romantic framework, then it is my purpose to show how 'presence' is in fact used to symbolic effect; how so-called empirical evidence in the form of realism and, on the other hand, artistic spontaneity designating longing, desire, aspiration, characteristic of the romantic/lyric mode, are drawn out and yoked. So much so that the rhetoric of 'presence' is established and becomes the inescapable truth of all expression.

There has been unmitigated trust extended to Ray's conscience story via Apu. But there is also the methodological ruse one can elicit from it: the truth-effect in the inadvertent form of an ethnographic allegory that will give us the clue to ramified cultural meanings—through reverse allegorical readings that work the text against the grain with political intent. While likening the Apu trilogy to an ethnographic allegory it becomes possible then to ask what significant displacement, what civilizational subversions it introduces in our notion of the contemporary.

It may be necessary to conclude with a set of paradoxical answers. First, it is probably the refusal on Ray's part to directly address the contemporary that makes the Apu trilogy function as a national allegory. For anything more frontal would be too partisan even as it would be, paradoxically, too divisive—like the contradiction of Indian independence presented by Ritwik Ghatak in his three post-partition films: *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Subarnarekha*, *Komal Gandhar*, and the 'betrayal' acted out in the body and myth of a radical consciousness in *Jukti Takko ar Gappo*. Satyajit Ray prefers a subtle, submerged, subliminal treatment of the contemporary/national; he conveys it through the conduit of individual sovereignty—the artist's idealized sovereignty, rendered like a romance of the liberal imagination, with the anachronistic figure of Apu guiding it through its narrative logic.

Thus Ray tells a real story and lets it work as a national allegory or, vice versa, constructs an allegory from otherness—the priestly family in feudal India—and makes it work as a tale of self-redemption and moral sovereignty for his own class and person. In this rendering the real struggle of the 'other' life, the life of the rural boy who makes the epic journey from the country to the city, is gently appropriated with the advantage of never having to admit to a social disjuncture as such. An organic identity is posited over and against any kind of historical formation. What is more, this kind of identity can assume a secular character by virtue of its having been delivered from the imaginary order, as a gift of past plenitude. So that one may then say that Ray arrives at the secular not through demonstrable negation of faith but through an aesthetic—a realism imbued with the grace of classicism, thereby with greater illusionism—that achieves the effect of a clarified and reasonable reality.

Ray fulfils for the Indian intelligentsia (and for a sympathetic foreign intelligentsia) its need to redeem the innocent pastorale—now left behind, as can only happen with a traditional/peasant society such as India *(Illus. 38, 39)*. He also achieves an authentication of the modern self engaged in the act of redeeming this recent past which slips away even as we interpret it. This is a mediatory role consisting of a conversion of the terms of allegory from ethnographic to national. The conversion succeeds because it is noncombative, because it undertakes a salvage operation, and because what is salvaged is common humanity with a glimpse of its nearly inexhaustible resources. Ethnographic data, seen as a form of material immanence, serve as a base for the nimbly placed narrative schema of a national allegory with the hope that in the end we will rationalize a lost world and even make it conform to a history that runs into the contemporary with comprehensible ease.

This too is a type of rhetoric which conceals its function and invokes instead a desire that is utopian in the ahistorical sense. The encoding of a haunting past not only places others—the eternal peasant, or the priest, or elsewhere as in *Jalsaghar* and *Devi*, the feudal lord—in a present always slipping into the past, into ruin, it not only denies a community or a class a future, but also obstructs inventive cultural

38 Apu daydreams while reading (*Pather Panchali*)

39 Apu, Sarbojaya and Harihar leave Nischindipur for Benares in a bullock-cart (*Pather Panchali*)

possibilities and historical change. An imaginary plenitude that nurtures and subsumes, evokes and concretizes the 'presence' we referred to above, also in a sense loses the future.

Village boys still grow up and move from the country to the city; they suffer loss and disaffection, poetic inspiration and bruised praise for their courage. If at the end of his life in 1992 Satyajit Ray were to tell the Apu story again it could never be the same as when it was told in 1955 or else it would appear entirely disingenuous (as indeed his late films often do). The substantive element of the story is never transparent; it is better seen as a material amalgam with different levels of density and opacity and (to pursue the metaphor) with geological faults in the bedrock on which the realist narrative pattern, or the conventional form of it, is constructed. Today, when the question of identity is thrashed about on various occasions—on grounds of regional authenticity, religious fundamentalism, national culture and the hegemonic universalism of advanced capitalistic polities—life-narratives have perhaps to be denatured to be even seemingly realistic. In other words, with the concept of identity so thoroughly problematized the fictive form itself must be subjected to the disruptive demands of reflexivity.

The sublimating ethics of the Apu trilogy notwithstanding (indeed precisely because of the cultural creativity that it so appropriately puts into place in postindependence India), we must test its cutting edge along the lines of the liberal ideology on which its aesthetic is based. If on the narrative impulse of that identity there could at one time be a transference between a person's and a people's sovereignty, today it would be difficult to find a social promise (or a trope) on which its formal (that is allegorical) transfer can be conducted. Today liberal ideology itself has to construct a narrative that includes the loss of that social promise, and along with that a methodological doubt about a coherent storyline. It would have to include the *absence*, and through fictive reversal and retake it would have to work towards an indefinitely delayed denouement, whether in the form of tragedy or, on the other

hand, some unaccountable *jouissance* perhaps. But the discreet optimism which Ray could once command, the aesthetic of gentle closures and unstressed beginnings, that kind of narrative ease would no longer suffice.

The very progressivism in the Apu trilogy can be seen in the paradoxical form of this conclusion to become diffused, to settle into a splendid hypostasis of hope. How then shall we read the allegory that the Apu trilogy evokes: as an indelible imprint on the national conscience not yet consciously elaborated or perhaps already vanishing in that remarkably optimistic first decade?

Notes and References

1 Ernest Gellner in *Thought and Change*, quoted in Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986, p. 4.

2 Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, chap. 5.

3 Ibid., p. 160.

4 The National Gallery of Modern Art, Jaipur House, New Delhi, was formally opened in 1954 by Dr Radhakrishnan, but its collection had already begun with a gift to Nehru in 1948, of a large number of paintings by Amrita Sher-Gil. Briefed to collect works from the nineteenth century, it now has a collection numbering nearly 30,000. The institution has from the start functioned under the Ministry of Education (Department of Culture). The Lalit Kala Akademi, one of three Akademis dealing with the different arts, was set up in 1954 by a parliamentary resolution initiated by Nehru and Maulana Azad, the then education minister. Though entirely state-funded, it is an autonomous organization with all-India representation comprising artists, critics and art functionaries. Over the years, regional centres have been opened in several cities. The Indian Council of Cultural Relations, also set up by the joint initiative of Nehru and Azad in 1950 and with the vice-president of India serving as its chairperson, promotes international cultural activity. The Film Finance Corporation, later called the National Film Development Corporation, was mooted as an idea to promote good cinema in the early 1950s, but came into existence with the direct encouragement of Indira Gandhi in 1960. It functions under the Information and Broadcasting Ministry with the brief of supporting noncommercial cinema. The National School of Drama, Delhi, and the Film and Television Institute, Pune, were started in 1961 and 1959 respectively, to serve as all-India institutions for higher learning in theatre and film.

5 Partha Chatterjee makes a qualified use of this concept throughout his *Nationalist Thought*.

6 See K.G. Subramanyan, *Moving Focus: Essays on Indian Art*, Lalit Kala Akademi, Delhi, 1978; and *The Living Tradition: Perspectives on Modern Indian Art*, Seagull, Calcutta, 1987.

7 Collated information on IPTA is available in *Marxist Cultural Movement: Chronicles and Documents*, Vol. III (1943–64), compiled and edited by Sudhi Pradhan, published by Mrs Pradhan and distributed by Pustak Bipani, Calcutta, 1985. See also Malini Bhattacharya, 'The IPTA in Bengal', in *Journal of Arts & Ideas*, No. 2, January–March 1983; and Rustom Bharucha, *Rehearsals for Revolution: Political Theatre in Bengal*, Seagull, Calcutta, 1983.

8 See D.D. Kosambi, *Myth and Reality*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1962.

9 Bibhutibhushan's story of Apu and Durga was serialized in a Calcutta journal in 1928 and published as a two-part novel titled *Pather Panchali* and *Aparajito* in 1929 and 1931 respectively. Bibhutibhushan was a unique man who led a life as opposed to the lives of the

privileged Tagore and Ray families as you could get in the city of Calcutta. A village boy, he managed to get a degree in Calcutta but lived the impoverished life of a schoolteacher just outside the city and then, from 1924, in Calcutta, where he came to know other writers, among them Nirad Chaudhuri. Generous and unembittered by his hard life, he became a widely popular writer and attained the status of one of Bengal's foremost authors.

When Satyajit Ray started dreaming up his filmmaking career in the late 1940s he chose *Pather Panchali* right away, recognizing that the novel was a classic in its own right and linked with the literary traditions of the world in terms of its generic structure. *Pather Panchali*, the first film, corresponded to the novel of the same name; the two subsequent films, *Aparajito* and *Apur Sansar*, were a two-part extension of the novel's sequel titled *Aparajito*. The three films were together called the Apu trilogy.

[10] Biographical material on Satyajit Ray is widely available. See especially, Marie Seton, *Satyajit Ray: Portrait of a Director*, Dennis Dobson, London, 1978; Chidananda Das Gupta, *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray,* Vikas, Delhi, 1980; and Andrew Robinson, *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye*, Rupa, Delhi, 1990.

[11] Satyajit Ray's family, among the most distinguished in Calcutta, were prominent Brahmos, beginning with his grandfather, Upendrakisore Ray, who was a pioneer in the Calcutta printing industry and the author of several articles on printing technology, published in the London-based *Penrose Annual*. He was also a writer–illustrator of children's literature including, most prominently, *Mahabharata for Children* and *Ramayana for Children*. Rabindranath Tagore, a family friend, was an enthusiastic advocate of Upendrakisore's writings. Sukumar Ray, Upendrakisore's son and Satyajit's father, began writing early, producing children's illustrated literature like his father and also criticism in the fields of photography, painting and literature. Returning from his studies in printing technology in London in 1913, he started a magazine for young people, *Sandesh*. This made him a household name in Bengal with nonsense rhymes such as *Abol Tabol* elaborated over several years. Although Satyajit never knew his father, the latter exerted a great influence on him. Satyajit edited, illustrated and designed *Sandesh* and made several children's films throughout his career, occasionally quoting his father's nonsense verse as in his film *Parash Pathar* (1958), even as he has filmed his grandfather's story *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (1968). He also made a fictional short on his father, *Sukumar Ray* (1987).

Sukumar Ray, who was a close friend of Rabindranath Tagore, travelled back with him from London in 1913. He involved himself in passionate debates within the Brahmos—the Ray family belonged to the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj—as for example on the question of Rabindranath's affiliation to Hinduism and the objections it raised among the Brahmos, as also his alleged equivocation on nationalist issues. Sukumar Ray, prone to premonitions of death and wrapped in pessimism on the issue of faith, withdrew from the Brahmo Samaj towards the end of his short life. Tagore deeply mourned his premature death at the age of 35 in 1923, when Satyajit was only two years old. For a detailed chronicle of Satyajit Ray's family, see Robinson, *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye*, pp.13–55.

[12] Nehru authorized the showing of *Pather Panchali* at Cannes at the express suggestion of Marie Seton. It is also worth mentioning that Nehru invited Roberto Rossellini to make his India films in the 1950s, that he knew John Grierson personally and that he invoked the tradition of the British second world war documentary in starting the Films Division (1949). Nehru's support for *Pather Panchali* could possibly be placed with other efforts to engage Indian cultural practices with those of European contemporaries in a reciprocal way. Indeed

one can conjecture Nehru's seeing *Pather Panchali* from a precisely nonorientalist point of view, wishing to show before the world that a self-emancipating India existed in the conscience of a confident *auteur* such as Satyajit Ray.

[13] The film was invited to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, by Monroe Wheeler on the strength of some stills he saw in 1954 while the film's shooting, begun in 1952, was in abeyance due to lack of finance. The film was to be shown in New York in 1955; in between Wheeler asked John Huston, who was coming to India, to be his emissary and check out the progress of the film. On the basis of a silent rough-cut Huston approved the film and later wrote glowingly about his early encounter with Ray.

[14] Among the numerous stories connected with the early success of Satyajit Ray it is worth mentioning that both at Cannes and Venice it was the English critics and filmmakers who supported him; the French in both cases found him by and large incompetent, as one can gauge from Rene Clair's comment—that as he had now won the award at Venice he should go away and learn how to make films. There is also the widely quoted comment by Truffaut that the film was merely 'pad pad pad about paddy fields'. However, the commercial release of the film in the Academy Cinema and the Fifth Avenue Playhouse, in London and New York respectively, was a clear confirmation of its international success. The explanation of this success in terms of the film's universal humanism and liberal progressivism is discussed in a very finely articulated evaluation of the Apu trilogy by Robin Wood (*The Apu Trilogy*, Praeger, New York, 1971). A compendium of worldwide comments on Ray (and by him) is to be found in *Film India: Satyajit Ray: An Anthology of Statements on Ray and by Ray*, edited by Chidananda Das Gupta, Directorate of Film Festivals, Delhi, 1981.

[15] Seton, *Satyajit Ray: Portrait of a Director*.

[16] Stanley Kauffman, 'World on Film', quoted in *Film India*, p. 27.

[17] Satyajit Ray had met Rabindranath Tagore only a few times while he was a student at Santiniketan. But Tagore's aesthetic continued to be an all-pervasive influence in Bengali culture long after his death in 1941. For a collection of Tagore's relevant essays, see *Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics*, edited by Prithwish Neogy, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1961. Apart from Tagore's aesthetic as available to Ray through his family connections in Santiniketan and via his philosophic essays, there is the whole world of Tagore's literature which is in fact the basis of several of Ray's films—*Teen Kanya* (1961), *Charulata* (1964) and *Ghare Baire* (1984). *Devi* (1960) was based on a story inspired by Tagore though written in fact by Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee. Ray also made the documentary *Rabindranath Tagore* (1961).

[18] Ray studied art in Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan, in 1940–42. He left without completing the course because he did not feel he had it in him to become a painter, and he joined an advertising company in Calcutta. But the experience had a lasting influence on his sensibilities and indeed on his loyalties, as his film on the artist–teacher Benodebehari Mukherjee, titled *The Inner Eye* (1972), shows.

[19] Ray knew Kurosawa and held him in deep admiration. It is interesting that Ray considered Kurosawa—regarded the most western among his compatriots in Japan—in terms of an affirmative orientalism, an ideology Ray derived from Santiniketan. Indeed he placed his love of Kurosawa in particular, and Japanese cinema in general, within the principles of an art practice learnt from Nandalal Bose, and on the ideological rendering of the eastern imagination by Okakura Kakuzu. See Satyajit Ray, 'Calm Without, Fire Within', in *Our Films, Their Films*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1976.

[20] Kurosawa, quoted in Robinson, *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye*, p. 91.

[21] Quoted in Seton, *Satyajit Ray: Portrait of a Director*, p. 114.

[22] Ray's interview with George Sadoul in *Cahiers du Cinema*, quoted in *Film India,* p. 130.

[23] Ray actualizes this in the way he directs the old actress, Chunibala Devi, to literally act out her life's spent talent. The moment of Indir's death which, in the years it took to complete the shooting of the film, could have truly been Chunibala's own death, is compacted into the thud of her skull on the ground as Durga shakes her already dead body huddled by the side of the pond. Finally abandoned, the bemused witch has meanwhile been subtly enlarged by Ray's camera and she sometimes gapes into the lens, head-on, in a tight close-up, seeing blindly into our faces. This itself is part of the actualizing job, a cruel, compassionate, humorously mocking image, reflected in the mirror of the lens. But there is also wonderful handling of the figure in profile or with her back to the camera walking away on one of her begging missions—thereby denuding the numen in what is almost a parodic act of will.

[24] 'Renoir came in 1949', Ray says, recounting his apprenticeship with Jean Renoir when he came to India to make his film *The River*, ' and the moment I discovered that Renoir was in town, I went and looked him up. He had a feeling for nature; a deep humanism with a kind of a preference for the shades of grey, a sort of Chekhovian quality; and his lyricism and the avoidance of cliches.' He further recounts that as he already had the making of *Pather Panchali* in mind he told Renoir about it while he helped him with location hunting in the suburbs and villages of Calcutta. According to Ray Renoir said, 'It sounds wonderful, make it, I think it will make a fine film.' Satyajit Ray in an interview quoted in *Film India,* p. 123.

[25] The embedding of cinematic realism within a phenomenological/existential matrix; the articulation of an ontology of the photographic image and the potential of film technology to replicate and replay lived life; the possibility of achieving a phenomenological plenitude as well as aesthetic transparency—all this makes Andre Bazin the prime theorist of cinematic realism during the 1950s. The highpoint of this aesthetic is Jean Renoir, with the Italian neo-realists as also Bresson forming a further extension. These issues are discussed over several essays in Andre Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974.

[26] For a discussion on the form and genre of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's novel under consideration, see Meenakshi Mukherjee, 'Pather Panchali', in *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1984.

The novel has been translated into English. See *Pather Panchali: Song of the Road*, translated by T.W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherjee, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1968; *Pather Panchali*, translated by Monica Varma, Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 1973; *Pather Panchali*, Rupa, Delhi, 1989.

[27] Ray, with a moderately articulate style, answers questions that we can reconfigure into an ideological position. For a series of selected statements see *Film India,* pp. 136–39.

'Somehow I feel that a common person—an ordinary person whom you meet every day in the street—is a more challenging subject for cinematic exploration than persons in heroic moulds, either good or bad.' (p. 136)

'I commit myself to human beings . . . and I think that is a good enough commitment for me.' (p. 138)

'I was closer to Nehru, I think. I admired Nehru, I understood him better, because I am also in a way a product of East and West. A certain liberalism, a certain awareness of Western values and a fusion of Eastern and Western values was in Nehru, which I didn't find in Gandhi. But, of course, as a man, as a symbol, in contact with India's multi-

tude, he was quite extraordinary. But as a man . . . I always understood what Nehru was doing as I understood what Tagore was doing because you can't leave Tagore out of this, it's a triangle.' (p. 138)

'But you have to have the backing of your own culture very much. Even when I made my first film the awareness was there. I had a Western education, I studied English, but more and more over the last ten years I have been going back and back to the history of my country, my people, my past, my culture.' (p. 138)

'I can understand and admire Mao's revolution which has completely changed China and achieved—at a cost—the eradication of poverty and illiteracy. But I don't think I could find a place in China, because I am still too much of an individual and I still believe too strongly in personal expression.' (p. 137)

'Well, go to Benares. Go to the ghats and you will see that communism is a million miles away, maybe on the moon. There are such ingrained habits, religious habits. I am talking of the multitude now, I am not talking of the educated, the young students, and, of course, everything falls back on education and the spread of education. . . . Only through education could it happen.' (p. 139)

[28] This term and the ensuing argument is taken from James Clifford. See James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986.

[29] Ibid., p. 98.

[30] Ibid., p. 100.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] James Clifford refers to De Man's critique of the valorization of symbols over allegory. See ibid.

[34] Ibid., p. 101.

[35] Ibid., p. 102.

[36] Ibid., p. 111.

[37] Ibid., p. 114.

[38] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, quoted in ibid.