

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.86

ISSN 0976 - 8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

— 12th Year of Open Access —

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Peer-Reviewed
Open Access e-Journal

Vol. 12, Issue - 4 (August 2021)

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Multidimensional Creations of Ray: Rereading Satyajit Ray's Literary Works

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Article History: Submitted-15/07/2021, Revised-12/08/2021, Accepted-13/08/2021, Published-31/08/2021.

Abstract:

Satyajit Ray's contribution to fiction has been considered mostly through the perspective of children's literature or visualized at the most as written for teenagers. A proper introspection into the literary works of Ray in the field of fiction shall reveal some elements common to most of them along with some contemplative aspects of life and art. The ills and evils of society etched in psychological delinquency have been juxtaposed with the innocence and simplicity of a young child in the fictional encounters of Ray. The appealing nature of his writing has been the story behind his success as a writer. No matter how complicated or delicate the matter, his writing has been able to communicate the essence of life. This has been the most discernible feature of his writing in a world otherwise torn apart by the doubts and internal debates of existential crisis. The endeavour to delve deep into the mind of Ray through his fictional characters is in itself an essential and enriching task.

Keywords: Satyajit Ray, fiction, introspection, psychological, innocence, essence, enriching

Introduction

Born on 2nd May, 1921 in the prestigious and renowned Ray family, Satyajit Ray went onto become one of the finest versatile genius that India had ever produced. His father, Sukumar Ray and grandfather Upendrakishore Ray were also eminent literary exponents of Bengal. Satyajit Ray was an Oscar winning film director and a prolific writer. Besides these, he was a scriptwriter, lyricist, magazine editor, illustrator, calligrapher and music composer. There has been huge scholarly research regarding the films made by him but the same can't be spoken of his fictional pieces. Though widely read and popular, the elemental concerns of the fictional works have been largely overlooked. The multifaceted characters created by

Satyajit Ray from the arena of the humble lives show the heterogeneity of feelings and gamut of emotions enclosed in day-to-day activities.

The three most well-known creations of Satyajit Ray are Feluda (alias Pradosh Chandra Mitter), Professor Trilokeshwar Shonku and Tarinicharan Banerjee. Apart from these there are several stories written by him and they too have some weird and wonderful characters to speak of. The stories traverse through both the bright and murky corners of the human psyche. However, it will be too cliché and even wrong to categorise his characters simply into good and evil. The dichotomy is way more intense intrigued by the occasional touches of anomaly. Ray's stories are marked by a sense of mystery even those not dealing with crime or science fiction. There has been special emphasis on perceiving the world of a child that is ever curious, ever expanding and full of vivid imaginative potential. But to perceive it is an immense task which has been often been felt in a diminutive way. The discernible features of his fictional works can be discussed under several heads.

Solitary Protagonists

Most of the protagonists in the works of Satyajit Ray lead either a solitary or lonesome life. In some cases, complete recluses have also been noticed. Even if the lead character is not a loner than at least they don't seem to have much of a social life. It is interesting to note that the protagonists are not married. In fact, very rarely we come across married characters in the stories of Ray. To discuss with, firstly comes Pradosh Chandra Mitter (alias Feluda) who is a sleuth. There's no romance in his life so to speak of unlike some other Bengali detectives. Feluda finds his camaraderie in two people; one is his cousin Topesh (called Topshe by Feluda) and another in a crime fiction writer Lalmohan Ganguly (pen name Jatayu). Through the Feluda series though all the characters grow in age the bond of the trio remains inseparable. Lalmohan Ganguly and Topshe to remain unmarried interestingly enough. Professor Shonku, the brilliant but strange scientist created by Ray is also unmarried and the same goes for Tarini Charan Banerjee (popularly called Tarini Khuro which means Tarini uncle), who is depicted as a famous story teller narrating experiences from his adventurous life.

The solitary mind is essential for creation. The lack of concentration is often due to diversion of focus arising from the presence of too many people around oneself. However, the line of demarcation between solitude and loneliness is very thin. A loner or an individual leading a reclusive life doesn't always add much to the benefit of the society. If one is too

absorbed in loneliness, that individual tends to develop a solipsistic outlook which is unhealthy for the social order. In his first ever written story “Abstraction”, Satyajit Ray explores the world of a secluded unnamed artist who is struggling to make ends meet. In “Shades of Grey” the narrator’s friend, a painter who’s the chief character of the story almost turns a recluse after a severe betrayal by a girl and loses faith in humanity all together. In the famous “Banku Babu- r- Bondhu”(“Banku Babu’s Friend”), the principal character Banku Babu, a school teacher, leads a solitary life and this lowers his self confidence to such a level that he is constantly taunted by his students at school and bullied by the residents at a local gathering. His approach changes dramatically after meeting with an alien Ang. In “Bipin Chowdhurir Smritibhram” (“The Memory Lapse of Bipin Chowdhury”), the protagonist Bipin Chowdhury is a man unfriendly by nature, with very limited interaction with the outer world. He is too concerned with his own world. His refusal to help a man Chunilal results in Bipin being tricked by Chunilal, although there’s not much harm done. “Mriganko Babu- r- Ghotona” (“The Incident concerning Mriganko Babu”) deals with a strange change in the life of Mriganko Babu who is also a loner. It perhaps deals with mostly a psychological problem arising out of over thinking by a lonely man.” Beeshphool” (“Poisonous Flower”) deals with the protagonist being tricked into believing that a certain type of flower is poisonous. The abundance of loneliness in life and lack of proper companionship can lead to disastrous results as seen in the two stories “Baatikbabu” (“Mr Idiosyncrasy”) and “Ratanbabu Aar Shei Lokta” (“Ratanbabu and that Stranger”).

Absence of Women

Most of the stories by Satyajit Ray discover the world of the male sex. It is either a male child or a teenager boy or a man who holds the central place in the stories of Ray. There’s almost a marked absence of women. Seldom do we find a girl or a woman appearing in the stories and even if there is some presence it is usually a glimpse. The writer Ray is remarkably different here from the director, because in his films women have been portrayed in the finest of manners concerning their minutest sensibilities, feelings and thoughts. In case of Feluda stories the readers hardly come across women characters. Most of the clients of Feluda are shown to be either unmarried or as widowers. Interestingly enough in no story do we come across a female client. One reason might be the fact that perhaps as Feluda is shown to be a youth icon characterised by boyish charm and not indeed the man who is at comfort with the idea of romantic involvement with a woman or having a great deal of introspection regarding a woman’s world. In the stories of Shonku, the weird scientist, there is almost no

presence of women characters with some little exception in one or two stories. Shonku, in being the inventor plays the role of both the mother and the father. In being the successful and genius inventor Shonku emerges as anthropogenic. First, the idea comes to mind, followed by the dedication to make the idea applicable and then to give them a proper shape. Tarini Khuro, another memorable creation of Ray is portrayed having led an adventurous life engaging in various kinds of jobs and accumulating weird and varied experiences including encounters with ghosts. In such an unsettled life the prospect of marriage hardly has any scope.

The presence of a woman often gives a mature sensibility to a piece of fiction. Even the presence of a female child adds that air of deeper sensibility which is hardly the case with a male child. Though equally appealing to all generations of readers, the target readers for Ray were children and teenagers. At such an early stage of development the male sex has often been found as occupied more by boyish concerns than the strong sense of maturity that comes with age. Without the certain depth of perception, it would not be possible to understand the psyche of the female sex who possess a great deal of maturity of thought from a tender age. So perhaps this may have been a principal reason for the absence of women in stories by Ray. Perhaps there's not even a single story having a female narrator or protagonist. Either the stories are narrated in third person about a male protagonist as is the case with "Abstraction", "The Memory Lapse of Bipin Chowdhury", "Banku Babu's Friend" and many more, or the stories narrated by a male narrator as in "The Shades of Grey", "Sadanonder Khude Jogot" ("Sadanondo's Little World"), "Anathbabu- r-Bhoy" ("The Fear of Anathbabu") and so on.

Psychological Elements

The stories written by Satyajit Ray delve deep into the human psyche to explore the mental faculty of individuals. Most of these people belong to the ordinary walk of life living a humble life. It's difficult to portray the psychological aberration in fiction predominantly meant for the teenagers including children. Ray achieves this in a well-crafted manner by the adoption of layering and subtlety in approach. It depends solely on the reader till how much the reader can possibly perceive. So, each story has a different degree of appeal for an individual which differs from the perception of another individual. However, nonetheless there's an element of restraint too. The complicated nuances of the psyche have never been discussed on the level of exaggeration or explicitness.

In multiple stories of Ray, Feluda is shown to be interested in interpreting the thoughts of the people involved in the cases for which he is appointed. Feluda states it more than once that to catch the culprit it is very useful to understand the mind of the criminal. The story “Dr Munshi’s Diary” is a special case for Feluda because the psychological element in this story is intense. Firstly, there are the incidents of past crimes and guilt conscience being discussed through the first half of the case. In the final part there is another force at play. The love and attachment of an elder sister for her brother reveals the mother underneath her although she doesn’t have a biological child. The need to ensure her younger brother’s future drives her to take a desperate and destructive step which shows the darker side of the human psyche that is instinctual and denies the morality in the face of insecurity.

The world of Shonku although dealing with science fiction brings upon psychologically complicated characters, often with an evil bent of mind. In “Dr Danieler Abhishkar” (“Dr Daniele’s Invention”) inspired from Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, both Shonku and Dr Daniele invent a potion separately that can bring out the evil nature of a human being. As a result of applying the potion upon himself, Dr Daniele goes out on a killing spree and ruthlessly murders the scientists (Dr Stabing, Dr Kruger and Dr Gomez) who criticised his idea of the manufacturing the potion. Under normal circumstances Dr Daniele wouldn’t harm a fly, but with a mad desire to know the power of his invented potion, he drinks it regularly and by the end of the story becomes almost addicted to it. His evil instincts overpower his reasoning and unleash a demon. Despite repeated advice and afterwards warnings from Shonku regarding the adverse, rather fearsome of the potion, Dr Daniele shows no disinclination from using his potion. The violence restrained within the unconscious of Dr Daniele breaks free and causes havoc. This instinctual violence can be considered as part of the concept of ‘shadow’ as put forward by Carl Jung who wrote that “Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is.” (131)

In *Hypnogen*, Shonku comes across a megalomaniac scientist Alexander Aloysius Crag. The only thing that concerns Crag is the acquisition of power and control. He is almost keen on becoming another God on earth. He has two robots working as servants whom he has named after the Norse Gods Odin and Thor. Crag goes against nature in defying mortality and coming back to life after death through his scientific genius. However, his principal motive is to gain control over the world through the use of a self created chemical agent called hypnogen. As the name suggests this chemical agent has the power to take control of

the mind on whom it is used. It is also shown that Crag has achieved remarkable success with the chemical by applying them on dangerous reptiles and also a black panther. His only concern further is to control the human world which he describes as his final 'adventure'. In another of Shonku's adventure *Swapnadeep (The Island of Dreams)*, he gets trapped in what seems to be some extraterrestrial mesh. Shonku visits an island called Florona upon the Pacific Ocean and it is here that strange looking colourful plants are found thriving upon the intelligence of the brilliant scientists of the world. Intelligence is broadly divided into two parts: Fluid intelligence and Crystallized intelligence. The ability to reason and think flexibly is called Fluid intelligence. The accumulation of knowledge, facts, and skills that are acquired throughout life is called Crystallized intelligence. The Cattell–Horn theory of intelligence states that these two types of intelligences interact and work together. To this was added J.B. Carroll's theory of three stratum based on narrow broad and general cognitive ability. The revised theoretical approach came to be known as Cattell-Horn-Carroll theory. In *The Island of Dreams*, Shonku along with some other renowned scientists are sapped of all of their intelligence by some mysterious plants on the island of Florona which later is discovered to be a part of some alien spaceship. It is also in a manner told in the story that intelligence makes an individual, without it there won't be any difference between an infant and a brilliant scientist.

In Professor "Professor Shonku o Aschorjyo Putul" ("Professor Shonku and the Strange Doll"), Shonku meets Gregor Lyndqvist who proclaims himself as a sculptor and doll maker. Lyndqvist has made six inches tall miniatures of famous persona and the dolls have almost an uncanny resemblance to the people whose dolls have been made. Herein lies, however, the darkest secret of Lyndqvist who's revealed as not an artist but a mad scientist as the story unfolds. Though apparently a tale of science fiction, it has psychological basis embedded in it. Lyndqvist preserves the human beings who are renowned in their fields by transforming them into miniatures! He controls them in accordance to his will because as miniatures they are powerless against him. He achieves this impossible feat with the help of science. Small things can be easily manipulated, and can even be destroyed at any instant. Lyndqvist is driven by this thought. In the 21st century when lives are getting constrained every moment, miniature gives us the illusion that we are still in control of something.

The short stories of Ray introduce us to a plethora of characters who always manage to amaze us through their usual unusualness and the opulence of rather humble situations. The intricacy of sensibilities found in the quotidian walk of life perplexes and amazes the

mind. Ray captures all such intricacies in the most organic and amusing way in his short stories. “Ratanbabu and that Stranger” narrates the story of Ratanbabu, a lonely man who enjoys his lonely space. He realizes that he’s too different to have friends and doesn’t feel the need to a great extent to have a one. He works as a clerk in the Geological Survey of India (Kolkata) and visits an almost remote place during his holidays in the festive season. However, things take a different turn when he meets his doppelganger in a place, he visits during one festive season. The uncanny similarity takes a huge toll on the psyche of Ratanbabu and it ends on a horrific note. While his doppelganger, Manibabu (or Manilal) warms upto Ratanbabu with the intentions of friendship, Ratanbabu feels almost an existential crisis in the presence of Manibabu. This story almost recalls the story “William Wilson” by Poe in which William ends up killing his double and ultimately finds his own life is in peril.

Collecting of things or materials which are valueless to the society may become an obsession for an otherwise lonely man. This is a rare case of obsessive-compulsive disorder. The individual with this kind of obsession can go to any length to gain what he feels he desires, although the thing may not have much meaningful value for the society at large. In “Mr Idiosyncrasy”, the protagonist Baatikbabu suffers from something similar. He collects various things like button, rusted plate, shoe brush, battery of torch light and what not. He states that every material he collects belongs to a dead person. He claims to have some extrasensory perception that allows him to visualize the conditions under which a person died when he comes across a material belonging to the dead person by chance upon the road. However, the real truth upon how he gains them is way darker and it gets revealed only at the very end of the story that Baatikbabu won’t stop at anything from getting the thing he desires even if it involves murder.

The guilt conscience acting upon a man can play tricks with the mind even to the extent that he may end up in a terrible state. In Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth*, the guilt of being involved in regicide had snatched sleep from Macbeth and had driven Lady Macbeth to schizophrenia. Though not written on such a magnanimous scale, Satyajit Ray’s story “Mr Sashmoler Sesh Ratri” (“Mr Sashmol’s Last Night”) deals with the idea of guilt with a note of dark humour. Mr Sashmol is visited by all the creatures he has killed while staying in a forest bungalow at night. When he tries to get some sleep, he is visited by a dog, a cat, a bird, a snake, ants and mosquitoes, all who have been killed by him at some point of time in his life. This indicates that he is violent and cruel by nature. Finally, he hears the footsteps of

Adhir Chakrabarty, his business partner whom he believes to have killed with a revolver. Ironically it is revealed that Adhir had escaped the bullet fired by Sashmol because the power went off when the bullet was shot. But the fear of meeting the ghost of Adhir leads to Sashmol's death! It can be perceived perhaps that all the creatures seen by Sashmol were hallucinations of a guilt-stricken mind.

“Bahurupi” (“The Polymorphic”) explores the world of an aged man whose only obsession lies in trying upon new disguises and venture out among his acquaintances to verify if anyone recognises him. This obsession increases to such an extent that the protagonist, Nikunjo Saha narrowly escapes the trouble of imprisonment being caught up in a troublesome situation. In the 21st century, the terms ‘mistrust’ and ‘suspicion’ have almost become the part and parcel of life. Faith is way too far in the midst of existential crisis. “Sadhanbabu-r- Sandeho” (“Mr Sadhan's Suspicion”), deals with Sadhan's peculiar habit of suspicion. He believes none and almost suspects anyone or anything. Though the story is narrated in a humorous manner and Sadhan becomes a victim of his own meaningless suspicion, the problem is indeed in reality a very chronic one. The harbouring of useless suspense for almost anyone or anything can be a part of what is referred to as the paranoid personality disorder. People with this condition are driven by a relentless mistrust and suspicion of others without adequate reason to be suspicious. This disorder often begins in childhood or early adolescence and appears to be more common in men than in women.

The name of an individual is considered as part of that person's social identity. Though it is extremely illogical and unethical to discriminate people on the basis of their names, but it does take place. Several people miss out on several opportunities despite their talents and skill just because of discrimination on the basis of nomenclature. The bias for certain names above others is often unconscious. However, ignorance can't be considered an excuse. Ray's story “Sishu Shahityik” (“Children's Fiction Writer”) gives a glimpse into the habit of discrimination based upon names and ultimately points out the irony behind such thought. Another of Ray's stories “Brojoburo” (“The Old Man Brojo”), hints at the problem of stunted mental growth. Brojokishore Banerjee (called by the name of Brojoburo) lives almost the life of recluse. The people of his locality suspect him to be a practitioner of black magic but it is ultimately found out that he loves children because he thinks himself to be a child too. Brojokishore is afraid of adults and has preserved the toys of his childhood in a green trunk, and he plays with them. His nephew, Amitabh Banerjee, a psychiatrist, states

that this disorder can't be treated at such an advanced stage and it simply needs some care and support.

Philosophy of Optimism

Optimism is concerned with a positive, cheerful or hopeful approach to life. The term is derived from Latin *optimum* which means the 'best'. The concept of optimism is often linked with the name of GW Leibniz, who believed that we live in the best of all possible worlds. Satyajit Ray incorporated an optimistic outlook in his short stories. It should be kept in mind that he was writing in an era when the two world wars had put human faith to the verge of doubt. People were disillusioned, depressed and devastated with life and the surroundings. Most significantly the hope had been lost. Ray, although a thoroughly practical man had not lost hope and believed in the positivity of life. His short stories bear reflections of his optimistic approach. In most of these stories we find a deeply positive note, a ray of light amidst all complexities and darkness of the post holocaust world. One primary reason behind such optimism was Ray's own quality of resilience. He braved huge obstacles and suffered a great extent in his life but never gave up hope. His first film *Pather Panchali* took three years to see the light of day due to several problems but when it was released it became an epoch-making film. Another reason behind Ray's positive outlook may have been due to the fact that he was writing fictional pieces mostly for children and young adults. The positive note in the stories provides an added appeal to them besides the element of mystery.

Feluda goes through several adventures in which his life often comes under threat. Even his nephew and friend Jatayu to fall into troubles for accompanying him, but the trio manages to come out of any situation whatsoever. This is largely due to courage and will power of Feluda in combination with his sharp mental skills. He is not afraid even in facing the tiger In *Royal Bengal Rahashya (The Royal Bengal Mystery)*. His most threatening villain Maganlal Meghraj tries to get the better of him in *Joy Baba Felunath (The Mystery of the Elephant God)* or *Joto Kando Katmandute (The Criminals of Kathmandu)*. Not even being held captive in a dark alley of Honk Kong by Hiralal Somani and his henchmen can hardly put him out of his sense of humour (*Tintoretto's Jesus*). Feluda is also able to save people from an otherwise hopeless situation. Even when the suspicion turns mostly upon DG Sen in *Hatyapuri (The House of Death)*, Feluda uses his skills of detection to bring the real culprits before the light of day.

The world of science fiction created around Prof. Shonku is beset with various difficulties. Some of them are perilous enough to be described as life threatening. However, Shonku emerges victorious in all situations by fighting back all obstacles. The scientific inventions of Shonku are imbued with the spirit of positivism mostly meant for the progress of science and mankind. In “Dr Danieli’s Invention”, Shonku faces life risk at the hands of Dr Danieli but ultimately emerges unscathed. In “Professor Shonu and The Strange Doll”, Gregor Lyndqvist turns Shonku into a six-inch toy, but again he finds a way out along with another of his friend, Archibald Ackroyd caught within the same peril. “Professor Shonku o Rokto Matsya Rahashya” (“Professor Shonku and the Mystery of the Red Fishes”) deals with the concept of alien invasion that puts to test the nerves and life of Shonku and this is well again the case in “Professor Shonku o Golok Rahasya” (“Professor Shonku and the Mysterious Sphere”). In *Shonku-r Shonir Dosha (The Terrible Fate of Shonku)* he is framed upon by another scientist out of jealousy for Shonku, however Shonku triumphs in removing his double with the help of his annihilating gun. In *The Unicorn Expedition* Professor Shonku saves the life of his friends Wilhelm Krol and Jeremy Saunders along with other members of the group from the clutches of dacoits while on an expedition in the search of unicorns. In “Professor Shonku o Adim Manush” (“Professor Shonku and Prehistoric Man”), Shonku saves the secretary of German anthropologist Henrich Klein from getting sacrificed under the guise of scientific progression. Every instance shows the optimistic thought working behind the creation of Shonku, the genius inventor.

It is through Tarini Khuro’s adventurous spirit that Ray takes the idea of optimism forward. Be it in the dramatic rescue of Tarini Khuro from imminent danger by a naughty kid in “Seth Gangaramer Dhon Daulat” (“Seth Gangaram’s Wealth”) or in the lifting off a curse from a royal family by selling a precious jewel on the advice of a ghost of a king as in “Maharaja Tarini Khuro” (“Emperor Tarini Uncle”), the positive tone of hope and faith in goodness is always dominant. Tarini Khuro also remains responsible for the reunion of two friends who once acted together in silent films, in the story “Juti” (“Couple”), therefore bringing together lost bonding and love again to the light of day.

From apparently hopeless situations, Ray’s protagonists rise again to some sort of prominence or prosperity. The unnamed artist of “Abstraction” discovers a strange feeling of joy when he discovers that he has been awarded the prize for abstract art that was an accidental creation behind his original painting, the abstract form of modern art which he despised finally fetches him the first prize in an art exhibition. Nikunjo Saha in the story “The

Polymorphic” is narrowly saved from being imprisoned as his disguise comes off at the last moment and the police realize he’s not the criminal they are looking for. Sukhomoy Sen, an artist, is saved from disgrace and destruction by the arrival of Ganesh Mutsuddi’s timely financial aid, the person whose portrait Sukhomoy had done many years ago in the story “Ganesh Mutsuddi-r-Portrait” (“Ganesh Mutsuddi’s Portrait”). Ray’s stories are remarkable in observing the philosophy of optimism because even when there’s a loss, Ray finds some positive element in it. The story “Pterodactyl er Dim” (“Pterodactyl’s Egg”) deals with the trick played upon Badanbabu by a stranger on an evening in which Badanbabu finds that his money has been pick pocketed by the stranger. However, in the manner of doing so the stranger has provided enough materials for Badanbabu to make stories for Biltu, his physically disabled child. To Badanbabu nothing is more precious than the smile of Biltu.

Emphasis on Art and Magic

Satyajit Ray was a master illustrator himself. He also had great interest in magic. It is quite evident that his interest for art and magic would get reflected in his fictional writing as well. Ray had imbibed this interest in art from his father, Sukumar Ray and grandfather, Upendrokishore Ray, who were brilliant in their illustrating skills. The wonder and joy imparted by magic has a special point of interest for children. Moreover, the concept of art is in itself an added charm for the young adults especially the ones interested in painting. The element of mystery in Ray’s stories is organically blended with art and magic.

One of Ray’s primary concerns with art was the disparity of forms. Ray was a lover of modern art and was inspired by the principles of naturalism in art. The concept of naturalism began in the early Renaissance period and continued to develop throughout the period. In the 19th century it came to be considered as a reaction to the ornamental and idealized depiction of subjects in the Romantic period. The presentation of realistic objects in an organic setting formed the basis of naturalism. William Baker and Albert Charpin were two major exponents of naturalism. However, it must be noted that though Ray admired the western style of art, he despised blind imitation of painters like Picasso. Ray believed the best art forms were born out of the synthesis of the east and the west.

In Ray’s first short story “Abstraction”, the unnamed protagonist is a strong advocate of realism in art which deals with the portrayal of things as they are. The modern art forms that present a fragmented and shattered reality trouble him. However, he unknowingly creates an abstract painting and is awarded the first prize. This triumph of modern art suggests Ray’s

love for progressive ideas in art. The artist in "Shades of Grey" is shown to be progressive in his conception of art and as a result people are hardly able to perceive his artwork in their truth. "Gagan Chowdhurir Studio" ("Gagan Chowdhury's Studio") deals with the terrible plight of an artist Gagan Chowdhury who considers Leonardo Da Vinci as his teacher and is unable to conform to the aspects of modern art. As a result, he is denied place in any exhibition and slowly fades into oblivion. Rajan Purokaista, is an artist who follows the tradition of modern art in his paintings but in case of creating portraits he is traditional in his approach which means that his human figures don't look distorted but like real human beings and this forms the perspective of art in "Protikriti" ("Portrait"). In "Ganesh Mutsuddi's Portrait", Sukhomoy Sen, a renowned portrait artist following the traditional style of painting incurs a huge loss of money and reputation in the bid to paint landscapes in accordance to modern ways of art. The story "Shilpi" ("Artist") deals with the journey of Abinash, the artist who shifts his style of painting from traditional to modern and still manages to remain successful. He even points out to his friend that modern art is not as easy as is considered by a layman but on the contrary it requires introspection and skill. However, the story ends with a subtle hint that the traditional approach to art is not all to be discarded. Feluda's adventure *Tintoretto's Christ* revolves around a mystery surrounding a painting of Christ by the great Italian painter Tintoretto of the Renaissance period. The concept of Renaissance art gets special attention in this regard that too in the post holocaust era.

With regard to magic, it seems that Ray was concerned regarding the two broad divisions of magic: the eastern and the western. The uniqueness of eastern magic primarily the magic that originated from India fascinated Ray more than the western style of employing too many machines for the performance of magic. However, he wished for the synthesis of elements from both the east and the west to achieve the best in magic. Moreover, the concept of magic being developed out of science and skill appealed the most to him.

The story "Dui Magician" ("Two Magicians") is concerned with the lives of two magicians. Tripurababu is a magician who never relies on equipments for showing any magic. He depends on his skill and will power for it. His former time student Suropoti becomes a renowned magician following mostly the style of Sheffalo who used instruments for his magical performances. However, the story ends with Suropoti finally learning the magic he had cherished for and that is the ring and coin trick of Tripurababu. "Bhuto" deals with the concept of ventriloquism narrating the lives of two ventriloquists: Akkur Chowdhury and Nabin. The story can be considered a tribute to this special skill. In "Dhappa" ("Hoax")

Samaresh Brahma, the magician employs two significant measures in his performances. He remains completely silent while performing his tricks and they are accompanied by Indian classical music comprising of the orchestration of the sitar, flute and tabla. The synchronisation of a trick with a notation of some raga music amuses the audience. Through this story the concept of performing magic is given a new angle or perspective. “Tarini Khuro and Oindrjalik” (“Tarini Uncle and the Magician”) charts the journey of how Suraj Singh, an heir to a king ultimately turned up into a magician Chamaklal. However, a significant aspect of the story lies in Chamaklal’s ability to read the thoughts of an individual’s mind along with being a master illusionist. In “Mahim Shanyaler Ghotona” (“Mahim Shanyal’s Incident”), hypnotism plays the pivotal role in uniting Mahim Sanyal and his son Anish Shanyal, when Mahim hypnotises Anish on stage. Professor Shonku also gets hypnotised by Chi Ching, a Chinese magician and gets bewildered in his trance like state. Chi Ching makes a dubious statement that magic and science are both born out of each other and his trick upon Shonku really amazes the latter in “Professor Shonku o Chi Ching” (“Professor Shonku and Chi Ching”).

Concern for Morality and Values

The question of morality is a grave concern in the 21st century when the immoral has become almost the most appealing element of society. Human temptation has always been there but the practice of self control has reduced to the minimum possible extent due to the diminished faith in the divine and hence immorality has emerged as the new order which is disorder underneath. Satyajit Ray’s world of fiction is marked by a deep concern for morality and values without being preachy. Be it the adventures of Feluda, Shonku or Tarini Khuro, the moral note has been felt enmeshed organically in the structuring of the plots.

Feluda has been shown to refuse the bribe offered by Maganlal Meghraj in *The Elephant God* and this has elevated his iconic stature to a greater level. The courage shown by Feluda in face of imminent danger is also praiseworthy be it before a criminal like Maganlal Meghraj or Hiralal Somani, or holding his nerve before a tiger or a rattlesnake. Nothing excites his temptation be it silver coins of historical value or money. He is solely driven by the love for mystery. He is passionate about the heritage of our country and risks his life to save the smuggling of ancient sculptures across country in *Kailashey Kelenkari (A Problem in Kailash)*. In *The House of Death*, Feluda stops the smuggling of ancient manuscripts of our country by some culprits. Shonku’s concern for the benefit of the earth

can be seen when he destroys the virus capable of harming the entire human race in "Professor Shonku and the Mysterious Sphere". Shonku refuses to sell the patent of his invention to Solomon Blumgarten in *Nakurbabu O Eldorado* (*Nakurbabu and Eldorado*). Shonku states that since his inventions are powerful, they are capable of being used in evil ways if they fall into wrong hands. Shonku is fond of plants and animals. He has his garden and loves his pet cat Newton. He also shows care and concern for creatures like crow, macaw, baboon, gorilla, as he comes across them in his various adventures. Shonku is honest to his profession as well and hates plagiarism. Tarini Khuro loves the company of children because he enjoys their curiosity and innocence. He is respectful towards people who really deserve credit and is courageous enough to face even the ghosts on several occasions.

It is often said that every pride has a fall. Ray too believed in this saying. He despised pride and arrogance in people, because he felt that those who are really gifted don't swell in pride but work in humility. His stories bear testament to this ideology. Moreover, the concept of punishment of a wrong is an extremely significant aspect of his works of fiction. Feluda stands as the harbinger of justice in his various adventures. In Shonku's world we also see the terrible fate of the wrongdoers. There are even hints of divine justice in Shonku's adventures as is strongly the case in *The Unicorn Expedition*. In one of Tarini Khuro's expedition titled "Dhumingaraher Hunting Lodge" ("Dhumingarah's Hunting Lodge"), a terrible revenge is achieved by the ghost of Adityanarayan who was killed by his younger brother Pratapnarayan for the greed of property.

In Ray's stories like "Hoax", "The Memory Lapse of Bipin Babu", "Sahadebbabur Portrait" ("Sahadebbabu's Portrait"), "Lakahpati" ("Millionaire"), the concept of pride has been severely shunned because the protagonists in each of these stories have been duped by the tricks played upon them by their friends or acquaintances. The concepts of morality and guilt have been portrayed in the finest form notably in two short stories of Ray: "Khagam" (name of a Pauranic saint's son who was turned into a snake for his wicked deeds by another saint Sahrapada) and "Mayur Kanthi Jelly" ("Peacock Neck Blue Coloured Jelly"). In "Khagam", the man is turned into a snake for killing a snake at the curse of a sage and that too in the 20th century! Such is the strength of morality that punishes the guilty in its own ironical manner. In "Peacock Neck Blue Coloured Jelly" a scientist becomes a victim of his own conscience after stealing the formula of longevity from the diary of his dead friend with the intention of publishing it as his own invention and also murdering a friend who has come

to know about this plagiarism. The blue coloured jelly stands here as the manifestation of conscience.

Elements of Horror

There are several stories of Satyajit Ray where we find elements of horror. Though the chills and thrills are gripping and frightening, he never overdoes anything. Keeping in mind his young readers especially children he presents the horror with restraint, as a result the stories never become gory and brutal but way more effective in their representation of the shock. The supernatural presence in his stories appeal more to the mental faculty rather than feeding the senses as is the case with most horror stories. The intensity is developed through layers and the eerie mood is formed out of carefully crafted situations. The concept of metamorphosis is put to effective use in this regard. In “Khagam”, a man is transformed into a snake for killing a snake due to the curse given by a sage. The descriptions of the transformations send chill down the spine, as the most intelligent mammal (man) gradually becomes a cold-blooded reptile (a snake) as part of punishment for his iniquity. Another story “Mrigankobabu’s Incident”, narrates how Mrigankobabu after beginning to take interest in the evolutionary history of man ultimately turns into an animal of the primate order. In “Professor Hijibijbij”, Satyajit Ray pays tribute to his father Sukumar Ray by weaving a tale of mystery and horror around an eccentric plastic surgeon Professor Hijibijbij. The name and idea regarding the development of this character has been borrowed from Sukumar Ray’s *HaJaBaRaLa*. Professor Hijibijbij claims himself to be a surgeon who creates new creatures by joining the various parts from various creatures. He also joins body parts from other creatures to human beings. He even claims that he has created new ears for himself by joining his own ears with the ears of the jungle cat. The idea of metamorphosis in this story is coupled with the dilapidated condition of the house in which Professor Hijibijbij resides with his man servant Sasthicharan.

Inanimate objects and desolate houses or forsaken residence of any kind are the most basic and instrumental means of developing the mood of horror in a story. Ray too utilises these tropes skilfully to create the suspense and eerie in his plots. In his story “Fritz”, Jayanta revisits the circuit house Bundi where he had stayed once in his childhood. The memory of burying a toy named Fritz after it was almost deformed by two dogs comes back to him. The ghost of the toy returns to adult Jayanta at night perhaps to play with him. “Kaagtarua”

("Scarecrow") is another story in which a scarecrow comes to life and takes the form of Abhiram, the former servant of Mrigankobabu. Abhiram was falsely accused of stealing Mrigankobabu's watch and thrown out of employment. The ghost of Abhiram informs Mrigankobabu that the watch has been lying under the almira of Mrigankobabu for the last three years. Finally, the piece of information provided by Abhiram's ghost is found to be true. In "Kutum Katam" the narrator's friend Dilip gets hold of a piece of wood that resembles the form of an animal. This wooden animal comes to life at night and disturbs Dilip's sleep. The problem is solved when the narrator manages to get hold of another wooden piece resembling the former, thereby bringing the pair together. The story "Anathbabur Bhoy" ("Anathbabu's Fear") states how Anathbabu, who calls himself a ghost hunter turns into a ghost after spending one night in a 200-year-old and forsaken castle popularly known as Halderbari (Halder's residence). The ambience of Halderbari created in this story is thoroughly scary but without any direct reference to blood and gore. The Evergreen Lodge of "Brown Sahaber Bari" ("The House of Mr Brown") takes the idea of horror and mystery to another level. The narrator Ranjan Sengupta goes there along with his friend Aneek and an acquaintance Hrishikesh Banerjee to spend an evening in the hope of meeting the ghost of Simon who is believed to haunt the house. Till the very end the readers wait in suspense along with the characters in the story as to when the ghost shall appear until a black cat appears and a voice from nowhere repeatedly calls it as 'Simon'!

Special Note on Journey and Food

Satyajit Ray's love for food and travelling is well documented in his fictional world. Even in personal life Ray travelled to various places as part of work and refreshment both in India and abroad (almost the whole of Europe). He really loved train journeys while moving within India and this has been remarkably portrayed in his works, of which *Badshahi Angti* (*The Emperor's Ring*) and "First Class Kamra" ("First Class Compartment") are especially notable for discussing about the comfort of train journey. Satyajit Ray enjoyed having certain kinds of food especially the Bengali cuisine, with a soft corner for the fish fry and the chicken cutlet. However, he never enjoyed eating too much, although he was a foodie. Most of his stories or novels contain at least some imageries of food. Most importantly, food is considered as a marker of cultural identity and hence the various kinds of food mentioned through the stories or novels of Ray, do help to portray the cultural background of a particular place, be it in India or abroad.

It is a very well known saying that travel broadens the mind. The various adventures of Feluda take him and the readers to various places. *The Emperor's Ring* takes place across Lucknow and Haridwar, while in *The Golden Fortress* he travels to Rajasthan, *The Mystery of the Elephant God* takes place in Benaras. In some of the adventures the names are itself suggestive of the places in which they take place like *A Killer in Kailash*, *The Bandits of Bombay*, *The Criminals of Kathmandu*, *Crime in Kedarnath*, *Trouble in Gangtok*, *Danger in Darjeeling* and *Feluda in London*. Each place has been described in its own aura and remarkability. Benaras, the city of lights appears in its spiritual enormity. The sea at Puri presents the vast expanse unto itself that rejuvenates the mind. Kathmandu is crowned with the jewels of historical magnificence along with harmony of diverse cultures and communities. Darjeeling glows in its pristine beauty presenting the lovely sunrise at Kanchenjunga. Sikkim is portrayed with its meditative monasteries. Rajasthan is depicted as the land of splendid forts and camels. Mumbai emerges as the land of aspirations and dreams. Hong Kong surfaces with its cosmopolitan grandeur, flamboyant markets and excellent management of traffic. In all of these adventures he is either accompanied by his cousin Topesh or by both Topesh and friend Lalmohan Ganguly (Jatayu). Feluda is also a foodie who doesn't hesitate in picking a leg piece of chicken or laddu (a kind of sweet) from the plate of Topshe. There are ample references to Bengali cuisine in all stories of Feluda along with the sumptuous chicken cutlets, fish fries or even an appetizer like betel leaves. Jatayu is not only a foodie but also eats quite to his fill. He loves relishing the prawn malai curry and also gobbles up the momo.

Shonku's adventures are mostly scattered across the world. In *The Unicorn Expedition* the brick tea stirred with bamboos and containing salt and butter deserves mention. In *Professor Shonku and the Strange Doll* Shonku states about enjoying the good quality of cheese while staying at Lyndqvist's residence in Norway, another story *Hypnogen* is also set in Norway. Two of Shonku's remarkable expeditions take place in Africa, namely *Shonku o Gorilla (Shonku and Gorilla)* and *Shonku-r- Congo Abhijaan (Shonku's Expedition to Congo)*. Egypt becomes the place of Shonku's adventures in "Nefrudet er Samadhi" ("The Tomb of Nefrudet") and "Shonku o Egyptian Atonko" ("Shonku and the Egyptian Terror"). Another of Shonku's adventure takes him to Baghdad in "Professor Shonku o Baghdader Baksho" ("Professor Shonku and the Box in Baghdad"). Norway is praised for its peculiarity in being the land of the midnight sun. Africa is portrayed as the territory of the wild and revered for being the cradle of civilization. Mystery and magnificent splendour are etched in

the depiction of the land of the pyramids (Egypt). Baghdad emerges straight out of the *Arabian Nights* with its magical secrets and spectacular glory.

Tarini Khuro has also travelled a lot. He has done 56 odd jobs across 33 cities of India which have made him an experienced and enriched man. He has encountered the ghost of the Conway castle in Pune. He has encountered the ghost of King Shatrughna Singh in a native state of Mysore. Tarini Khuro doesn't forget to make a mention about the wonderful food he enjoyed there. Tarini Khuro himself considers Rajasthan as an adventurous place bedecked with romantic charm. Therefore, he feels an immense urge to go there on the recommendation of his Dahrani uncle for a job. He forms a beautiful bond with the son of Seth Gangaram while working as the secretary of Gangaram in Ajmer. He also witnesses the duel between two ghosts in Lucknow in the story "Lucknow er Duel" ("Lucknow's Duel"). In the story "The House of Mr Brown" there is a significant mention of the flask of hot coffee and a box of ham sandwiches being packed for the narrator and his friends for spending an evening in the Evergreen Lodge. The narrator too travels here from Kolkata to Bangalore primarily to spend an evening in the Evergreen Lodge. Bangalore is praised for the quality of its soil that is suitable for cultivation of flowers like roses. In "Professor Hijibijbij", the narrator of the story meets the eccentric surgeon Hijibijbij while on a trip to Gopalpur city located in the district of Orissa. The story of "Brihadchonchu" ("Big beaked"), narrates about the bond between a giant bird and Tulsibabu which he comes across in the forest of Jagaddalpur. It is repeatedly mentioned in the story that nothing surprises Tulsibabu except the wonderful taste of the moglai paratha and kebab of Mansur's shop. In the story entitled "Master Angshuman", the protagonist of the story Angshuman is an early teenager (around 12 years of age). He goes to Rajasthan after getting selected to act in a film and in this trip he gets an experience to remember, and even then he doesn't forget to mention about the breakfast comprising of ruti (made out of flour), egg and jalebi (a spiral shaped sweet).

Special Note on a Child's World

The exceptional ability to perceive the world of a child has perhaps been inherited by Satyajit Ray from his father Sukumar Ray and grandfather Upendrakishore Ray. The imagination and feelings experienced by a child reach up to any extent. So, describing the world of a child in the most sincere manner is in itself a daunting task which Satyajit Ray has done very effectively. In "Sadanonder Khude Jogot" ("Sadanondo's Little World") Satyajit Ray delves into the mind of 13year old Sadanondo, whose real friends are ants because the

boy and the ants reciprocate the feelings of love and concern for each other. In the story “Shibu o Rakhosher Kotha” (“Shibu and the Demon’s Story”), Shibu is tricked into believing that his maths teacher at school, Janardanbabu is a demon in disguise and this trick of words is played upon him by eccentric minded Phatik. Another story “Anko Sir, Golapibabu aar Tipu” (“Maths Teacher, Pink Man and Tipu”) deals with the bonding between Tipu, a small boy and an alien whom Tipu addresses as Golapibabu, and when Tipu is troubled by the presence of a new maths teacher who prohibits Tipu’s reading of fairy tales, Golapibabu comes to Tipu’s rescue. Golapibabu transforms the horse into a flying horse with wings when the maths teacher is riding it thus recreating the myth of Pegasus found in Greek mythology. In “Pintur Dadu” (“Pintu’s Grandfather”) we come across the eight-year-old Pintu whose sole concern lies in the fact that unlike the grandfathers of his friends, Pintu’s grandfather doesn’t share a normal bond with him. It is only at the end of the story that Pintu finds his grandfather smiling and playing like a little boy instead of being sombre. However, this change is a result of psychological degeneration of the old man. Though “Pikur Diary” (“Piku’s Diary”) deals with the terrible story of how a family gets ruined, it is all seen from the eyes of little Piku. Much of the things don’t make much sense to him, as is natural. He lives in his own world but is observant enough to write down whatever is happening around him in his family. Satyajit Ray has deliberately omitted the pauses in correct places along with incorporation of spelling mistakes to make the readers feel as if the diary is indeed written by a small boy.

Conclusion

No matter how much is discussed or written about the magical maestro Satyajit Ray, there will always be some unexplored regions. The fictional literature produced by Ray has encompassed the multitudinous aspects of life. The numerous novels and stories by Ray have been able to capture the finest sensibilities of the human mind without being overtly explicit or being unnecessarily complicated. The depths of introspection and the heights of sublimity attained by Ray in the apparent simplicity of presentation is in itself the most remarkable achievement. The special emphasis in Ray’s stories has been placed in the conceptualization of the human psyche. The elements of his fictional world are intense and appealing. The present paper is directed at decoding the meaning behind the fictional works of Ray. There has been an attempt to find some unifying structure and underlying aspects of his fictional works. Besides considering his famous creations like Feluda, Professor Shonku and Tarini Khuro, numerous other stories written by Ray have been analysed and commented upon.

New and undiscovered territories of Ray's creations have been contemplated upon and discussed in regard to his scope of fictional writing.

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