

Ray's Use of the Liminal Space and the Female Gaze: A Reading of Oscillating Moralities in 'Charulata' and 'Bimala'

Authors : Rajlekha Sil

Abstract : This paper aims to investigate Ray's portrayal of liminality and the female gaze in 'Charulata' (1964) and 'Ghare Baire' (1984), both of which primarily articulates the stories of two women (Charu and Bimala respectively), entangled within the cobwebs of their seething, unfulfilled sexuality, amidst a newly-globalised urban culture, punctuated with political turmoils and ideological conflicts. Their tempestuous interactions with the societal space, both tangible and intangible, that surrounds them, and the men in their lives makes them dwell in a liminal space, filled with an ambiguous sense of virtue. In Ray's films, this sexual ambivalence is characterised by the liminality between the scenic and extrascenic spaces, which, in turn, defines the female gaze as the director's lenses paint a picture of the new wave of socio-political and socio-cultural movements in early twentieth-century Bengal. Brinda Bose's essay on 'Modernity, Globality, Sexuality, and the City: A Reading of Indian Cinema', analyses the 'necessary' process of urbanisation as a marker of 'moral degeneracy of the nation easily analogous with female sexual transgression/ promiscuity with the nation personified as a woman, by using the concept of the liminal space, a site of both empowerment through transgression and containment through regulation.' My paper, however, would focus on the liminal space propagated by Ray through his contrasting depiction of scenic and extrascenic spaces to satiate the equivocal voices in Charu and Bimala, along with their way of 'gazing' into an equally disheveled society - a gaze that helps them transcend the barriers of politics and urbanization into a state of universal uniformity, symmetrical with their sexual immorality. The first section of the paper would explore Ray's usage of these theatrical spaces through his character sketches, shots and dialogues, while the second section of the paper would delve into the 'female gaze' on a newly revolutionised society.

Keywords : satyajit ray, space,gaze, female sexuality, charulata, ghare baire

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