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**PHILOSOPHY AND ART PRACTICE IN FILMS OF
SATYAJIT RAY**

AMITA VALMIKI

Theorizing and philosophizing about films is not as old as theorizing and philosophizing about other forms of art – say painting, music, dance, theatre or court jesting (as was found in the olden times in a king's court to entertain, where the jester was considered an artist to entertain king and the people). It was in the late 20th century that thought of cinema as a serious 'Art-Form', and philosophizing films, took a giant leap with the recognition of films being a magical screen portraying political, economic, social, geographical and most importantly (and that was indispensable at any given time) the aesthetic element to either entertain or educate or rebel or revolt or reform against the existing system.

The role played by cinema has been stupendous from the time of its inception. In the cultural depiction on the screen films are influenced by the existing culture; but once produced it effects the audience's psyche and brings forth desirable (or undesirable) changes in the society as well.

My contention in this article is not one that is sociological, but rather that 'Cinema' or 'Film' as an independent art form. What about it attracts the audience for few minutes or hours? This makes me explore the theories of film that philosophize films and place films at par with other forms of art. This requires us to philosophize films not in a so-called normal philosophical methodology; but employs 'the other faculty'

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to theorize. This is well justified in the following quotation, "In one sense, however, philosophers need not justify their interest in film, for philosophical aesthetics has always had concern not just with art in general but with specific art forms."¹

Films can, in fact display philosophical concepts more conspicuously and unequivocally. In fact, if the 'real' comes clearly through documentaries, the 'Real' comes more precisely through feature films. As noted by Mary M. Litch, "Film, like other forms of fictions, can never even make the transition to philosophical thinking easier. [...] A movie can be an effective tool for introducing a philosophical topic, because it allows the viewer to drop many preconceived notions."² So ultimately philosophy of film is more a branch of pure aesthetics; and 'pure aesthetics' imbibes in itself (as Indian Philosophy says) morality, purity and beauty (*satyam*, *shivam* and *sundaram*).

In connection with the above mentioned point, it is really interesting to know that there are various theories of films and films can be viewed from the magnifying glass of these theories, namely – we have Marxist film theory, Formalist film theory, Feminist film theory, Psychoanalytical film theory, Auteur theory and others. But there are also critiques of these theories that do not prefer to categorize films in different theories. As American philosopher Noël Carroll argued, placing a film in one particular category is to narrowly define a film, saying that 'this particular film belongs to this genre'; instead, film can be viewed generally with distinct viewpoint, philosophizing either within many theories or with complete divergent philosophical interpretation. But philosophers of film like Hugo Münsterberg (of Silent films), Rudolf Arnheim (Critique of Talkies), André Bazin (Reality depiction in films) and Kendall Walton (of Transparency Thesis) do not agree with Noël Carroll's point of view on cinema. Film does something. Despite depicting reality by mixing two or three art forms, it has the potential to depict 'the real' through the real.

So, the major question that crops up in the mind is if we can have 'Philosophy of Films' as we already have had 'Philosophy in Films'?

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Some American and European philosophers do agree that we can theorize films, philosophize films and can have a complete methodology to study films; not as an unconscious process of evaluating film that is going on in the mind of the viewer (audience), but 'a deliberate conscious evaluation' can be done. So, a scientific study of cinema is possible. But William James opposes this idea; as later Ludwig Wittgenstein said, it is 'a language game' for linguistic analysis where subjective element cannot be reduced or studied like objective sciences or natural sciences. So, one must not commit this fallacy of assimilating 'philosophy of film' to 'study of natural sciences'. But center the subject into 'humanistic studies.'

At this very juncture, I would like to bring these two different ideas – one of 'philosophy of films' (this being the 'cognitive film theories' with a systematic approach to films) and second the 'philosophy in films' as 'humanistic discipline' – together in the films of Indian Bengali director Satyajit Ray (1921-1992). There is a clear realization and manifestation of Auteur theory in Satyajit Ray's films.

What is Auteur theory? Auteur theory states that the auteur (or director) is the cardinal force behind making a film. S/He is the author of a film. Andre Bazin (1918-1958) believed that it is the director who is the 'soul' behind the film, and it is his or her personal signature that is imprinted in the film, his or her personal mark that is the remarkable contribution of the film-maker to make 'only this movie' and 'not that movie'. Bazin believed that a film gets its due credit when it depicts the realistic aspects of life (and manifest 'the Real'); that each frame of the film is a part of 'the whole', in fact it contributes and completes 'the whole'. This particular ideology of Bazin is an important contribution to the Auteur Theory. In this category one of the names that conspicuously surfaces is Satyajit Ray. He is one of the directors who kept to the views of Andre Bazin, like Akira Kurosawa, Ingmar Bergmann, Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Goddard, Alfred Hitchcock, Majid Majidi and the like. In fact, it was Francois Truffaut (French film director) who gave the term 'auteur' (i.e., author); what an author is to

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literature, a director is to film. "Truffaut used the term polemically to denigrate the then dominant mode of film-making that which emphasized the adaptation of great works of literature to the screen. In the attempt to valorize a different style of film-making, Truffaut argued that the only films that deserved to be designated art were those in the director had complete control over its production by writing the screenplay as well as actually directing the actors. Only films made in this way deserved to be given the status of works of art."³

As explained by Ian Buchanan, "(auteur theory is) A theory of film which not only ascribes the director with an authorial-like control over the final look of the film, but also dismisses as worthless those films in which no such unity of vision is discernible."⁴ So, when people criticized American films as just commercial box office successes, later the auteur theory took to its stance the contribution of others as equally important. But "...it nevertheless upholds the idea that the final look of a film can be attributed to a single individual."⁵ In many ways, it means the films by Satyajit Ray fit into the mould of auteur theory. Ray tried through his films to pull out the inner essence of the characters; though the character may not be of a high status, well-educated or belonging to a high caste (in Indian context), Ray glorifies the characters through inner perception of the essential features present in the character. Ray broke the monotonous mould of making movies that were approved by film-makers in his time. Ray was born in a Bengali family, who were lovers of art and culture. This had tremendous influence on Ray as a boy; the legacy continued later in his life. Ray directed twenty-nine full length feature films, eleven documentaries, eight television films or series, two short films and two films for advertisement. His career graph has only seen the complete artistic finesse. His contribution to literature is immense as well – novels, short stories (especially for younger generation), poems and essays, with drawings and sketches; these have contributed additionally to his film making. He made his characters completely believable and plausible. Initially he worked as a junior visualizer in a British owned advertising company. India being a

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British colony, there was a lot of leverage of Western world on his movie making. He studied in Shantiniketan where he was influenced by Western music along with (being already exposed to) Indian classical music. In his stories for children, two characters became very famous with children as well as with adults namely Feluda, a detective, and Prof. Shanku, a scientist. His books on cinema comprised *Our Films Their Films* and *Speaking of Films*, along with other essays on films. *Deep Focus* was a book published posthumously, edited by his son Sandeep Ray. Ray travelled extensively to places which were historically significant. He also founded, along with his friend Chidananda Dasgupta, the 'Calcutta Film Society'. Ray thoroughly studied Western films. Ray, on work assignment, had been to London, where he saw many European movies; and his association with Jean Renoir prompted him to become a film-maker. Vittorio De Sicca's film *Bicycle Thief* (*Ladri di biciclette*) rendered tremendous influence on Ray's psyche and he decided that he will be 'a film-maker'.

Ray had his signature mark on films, so he produced 'only this kind of movies, and 'not those'. 'Only this' referred to depicting real-life nuances with aesthetic and creative touch. For example, his conversations with Renoir, which Ray mentions in the book *Deep Focus*, shows how subtle experience with details contributed in making Renoir's films, which Ray took over as a film-maker. "Look at the flowers", said Jean Renoir one day while on a search for suitable locales in a suburb of Calcutta for his film *The River*. 'Look at the flowers', he said. 'They are very beautiful. But you get flowers in America too. Poinsettias? They grow wild in California, in my own garden. But look at the clump of bananas, and the green pond at its foot. You don't get that in California. That is Bengal, and that is (here Renoir used the word that was in his vocabulary meant wholehearted approval) fantastic.'⁶ Ray's books on films make the reader feel his authorship in films, but at the same time he is not underestimating the contribution of other intrinsic components. Ray is very clear about the process of film-making being very 'demanding

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creative activity", more than other forms of art. According to him following stages are necessary in film-making:

1. Writing – It is creative and an intellectual stage.
2. Filming – It is also creative and involves cerebral, physical and emotional faculties of the director. And,
3. Editing – It is also highly creative and analytical.

These are the areas found, highly refined, in Ray's films. The director has to deal with it. The director is such a power that commands and usually, for Ray, directors don't need others' opinion on their film-making. This is emphatically said by Ray in his book *Our Films Their Films*, "This reticence has encouraged the growth of a mystique which has helped the film maker to sustain his ego while concealing his vulnerability. His ego is an indispensable part of his equipment..... Indeed, he knows well that as long as the film is in making, he is the one who is expected to dominate."⁷

In consideration of movies that I have chosen from Ray's film career, it ascends from realism to the 'real' (name it essence or form) in the aesthetic terminology, in comparison to Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen – other Bengali film directors – who took cinema as a tool or medium to depict reality. For example – Ritwik Ghatak's film *Meghe Dhaka Tara* or Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* (in Hindi) uses surreal elements to reach 'the real world', coarse or pierce sound, vast landscapes trying to engulf the horizon, sudden still frames in lot of activity, and close-up of human characters; these add the surreal element to the film which takes a leap to empirical world. Since, in a short time period, the whole life span has to be exhibited, this becomes a pre-requisite condition. But it is exactly the other way round in Ray's films. The real element takes the audience to the surreal world; that which is closer to the inner world, then the real. Therefore, Ray gives enough time to his characters (actors) to define themselves and with serene music gradually one moves to the world that is transcendental – the element of 'transcendence' is so gradual that the audience is forced to see the film twice or thrice or more to touch 'the real' that gradually unravels the layers. This gradual

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transcendence is so very engrossing that every time one watches the same movie, every time there is a new revelation, a new dimension is added to one's psyche. For example, the film *Pather Panchali* (*The Song of the little Road*) (1955), Ray's first feature film. People were very apprehensive that the novel (by Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay) on which the film is based is not of 'film-material type'. On this Ray had to say (that suffices the above-mentioned point), "This betrays our ignorance of things filmic. One can be entirely true to the spirit of Bibhuti Bhushan, retain a large measure of his other characteristics – lyricism and humanism combined with a causal narrative structure – and yet produce a legitimate work of cinema. Indeed, it is easier with Bibhuti Bhushan than with any other writer in Bengal. The true basis of the film style of *Pather Panchali* is not neo-realist cinema or any other school of cinema or even any individual work of cinema, but the novel of Bibhuti Bhushan itself."⁸

Pather Panchali (*The Song of the little Road*) is the first in the 'Apu Trilogy'. It is about a young boy Apu. His family in colonial India, in West Bengal, his surrounding, the death of his grandma, and his sister Durga – leave a vacuum in Apu's subconscious. The second in the 'Apu Trilogy' is *Aparajita* (*The Unvanquished*) (1956). It depicts Apu as a teenager, his moving outside the state of Bengal, in Banaras with his father and mother, his confrontation with the death of his mother after his father's departure; again, the death of his mother leaves a deep impact on young Apu. The third film in the trilogy is *Apur Sansar* (*The World of Apu*) (1959). An adult Apu, by default getting married to a cousin of his friend Aparna, and her death during child delivery leaves Apu devastated. Living a life of a recluse, in the end he reunites with his son. All the important women in Apu's life leave deep scars on his psyche and his realization of worthlessness of life. But life continues and this finite continuity leads to infinite realization. So says Ray on *Apur Sansar*, "*Apur Sansar* thus grew out of situations conceived by the author himself. I, as the interpreter through the film medium, exercised my right to select, modify and arrange. This is a

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right which every film-maker, who aspires to more than doing a commercial chore – to artistic endeavour, in fact – possesses.”⁹

Jalsaghar (The Music Room) (1958) (based on a short story by Tarashankar Benerjee) is a path breaking film, a risk that is beautifully and aesthetically handled. Morality and virtues are woven beautifully to bring out its aesthetic element par excellence. The film revolves around a landlord Biswambhar Roy who tries to host the last music concert knowing that he has to put all his wealth, the last penny, at stake. Roy could not succumb to the industrial advancement introduced by Britishers in imperial India; where he definitely is ready to wear spectacles to show how progressive he is but could not relate himself with the techno-material demeanor of the West. Ray has chosen real maestros for dance and music sequences, for example, Bismillah Khan (a flutiest), Begum Akter (a classical singer) and the like. As explained by Derek Malcolm, many of Ray’s films can be ranked among the best hundred films of all time. “But the film I would select above all is 1958’s *Jalsaghar*, or *The Music Room*, which proves beyond doubt that this writer, composer, illustrator and film-maker, who was sometimes accused of being more Western than Indian, was no such thing.”¹⁰

Charulata (The Lonely Wife) (1964) is based on Rabindranath Tagore’s novel *Nastanirh (The Broken Nest)*. The film is about a highly, lonely talented wife of a highly cultured husband who is busy with his printing press that propagates Indian Nationalism against the British rule. The lonely wife Charulata is guided by her husband’s cousin Amal in writing poetry, they are attracted to each other. But Amal doesn’t wish to betray his cousin (Charu’s husband) and leaves; while Charu confesses her relation to her husband; both being mature individuals seek compromised reconciliation. Though the film has been criticized as being inclined toward West, Ray is very clear about its ‘real Indian-ness’. He says, “Snatches of song, literary allusions, domestic details, an entire scene where Charu and her beloved Amal talk in alliterations (thereby setting a hopeless task for the subtitler) – all give the film a density missed by the Western viewer in his preoccupation with plot,

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character, the moral and philosophical aspects of all story, and the apparent meaning of images.”¹¹

While *Charulata* deals with highly sensitive characters, so does *Nayak (The Hero)* (1966). Though *Kanchenjunga* was made in 1962, that is prior to *Nayak*, I prefer to take *Nayak* first because the two characters, namely – Charu (in *Charulata*) and the hero called Arindam (in *Nayak*) are similar on emotional platform, both highly talented and ultimately feeling forlorn and lonely are on the path of self-realization. In *Nayak*, a film star Arindam is travelling by train from Calcutta to Delhi to receive a national award, and confronts a journalist, Aparna. The character of Amal (the cousin) in *Charulata* is akin to Aparna, the journalist. In the conversation between the journalist and the hero, the hero realizes his lonely status amidst the crowds, utterly poor despite being very rich (shown through two dream sequences). The dreams being highly surrealist acquaints the audience with the real world. Ray has written the story and screenplay for the film.

Kanchenjunga (1962) is one of my favorites of Ray movies. It is the first colour film by Ray and he also wrote the first original screenplay for the film. The film is about an upper-class Bengali family having their summer vacation at the hill station in Darjeeling, from where the peak of Himalaya's Kanchenjunga is seen. The film has real time narrative sequences with a number of characters forming different groups, where relationships are evolved. This film is also about self-realization of some of the leading characters of the film. Some characters realize the self, whereas other characters realizing their self, deplore the fact of self-realization, wanting to keep themselves blind about to their self, playing safe with the idea that ignorance is bliss. In Alissa Quart's terminology, this film resembles later 'hyperlink films.' Hyperlink films deal with multi-tasking, playing with time and characters' personal life history where there is proper entangling of storylines, and may deal with flashbacks as well.¹² Though the film did not beg good reviews, this film due to its hyperlink aspect becomes very intriguing. Ray himself has said about the film (keeping within the context the hyperlink

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theory), "Yes. Our audience likes a central character, or a couple of central characters with whom they can identify, and a story with a straight narrative line. (But) Kanchenjunga told the story of several groups of characters and it went back and forth. You know, between group one, group two, group three, group four, then back to group one, group two, and so on. It's a very musical form, but it wasn't liked. The reaction was stupid. Even the reviews were not interesting. But, looking back now, I find that it is a very interesting film."¹³ Since Ray was well versed in music, Indian and Western as well, he loved to give his inputs in the background score, either directly being a music director for his films or counselling the music director. In any case he had an upper-hand, as he was the 'author' of his films. He was a film-maker who literally translated the literary work into his films. This translation for him was an inevitable aspect. He handled human relationships, emotions, struggles, joys and pains in such a 'Ray-nian' style that while watching his movies one immediately responds 'this is a Ray movie'. The blend of the mundane and the transcendental in his films brings out humanity and humane sublimities with a sense of aesthetic creativity. He worked on films like Pablo Picasso worked on paintings. Though Ray belongs to the 'neo-realist' tradition, he is not specifically belong to any 'ism'. This is precisely the attributes of Ray due to which his films flow in freedom of expression. Once a film-maker is type-cast, s/he is bound by rules – formal or informal. But once a film-maker transcends all 'isms', every film becomes unique and a novel creation. Again, precisely this attribute of Ray makes the audience interpret his films in their own fashion. So, not only Ray as a film-maker works with freedom, in freedom; but the same is foreseen in his audience. Ray was 'a faithful auteur' rather than 'a true auteur'; 'faithful' because he dealt his characters in his films on humanitarian ground with complete 'humane aesthetics'. 'Humane aesthetics' is well defined in Indian Philosophy as put earlier - *Satyam* i.e., Truth, *Shivam* i.e., Purity and *Sundaram* i.e., Beauty. Ray is not 'a true auteur' because that would make him more like a dictator, however good the dictator may be, still s/he remains an

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oppressor in literal sense. If at all Ray is taken as 'a true auteur', it can be said that he had a final word in all subordinate branches of film-making, say, writing screenplays, (sometimes original story is also written by Ray), art works like set-designing, costume designing (where Ray actually drew his characters, with costumes, props, and back-ground set), he used to operate camera as well (since *Charulata* – 1964 – was made), and the music score used to be his since 1961; not satisfied with this, he even used to do calligraphy and posters of his films (this was easily possible for Ray as he was a graphic designer early in his life).

No doubt Ray has been criticized for controlling almost all aspects of his films; though one of the greatest auteurs of world cinema but auteur with dictatorial dominance. Even the axiological stance that he took in his films apparently seems like age old virtues being glorified. But to justify his authorship, Andrew Robinson says, "To achieve his simplicity and immediacy on screen required of Ray a high degree of discipline. The unobtrusiveness of his technique stands in direct proportion to the power of Ray's concentration on it: 'everything in a film is difficult', he (Ray) said with inimitable candour. But it also invites dismissal by those who feel that a film should draw attention to its style. There is a widespread impression, even among some of Ray's admirers, that his technique is somehow 'old-fashioned', in keeping with his moral outlook. They are misled by his lack of external trademarks. His technique derived from the subject matter in hand, which varied greatly with his constant urge to experiment, and so his films are linked together not by their surface but by their essence: the attitude shown to the people in them by their maker."¹⁴

The above quotation makes it clear that to bring forth the subtleties of human emotions, Ray needed to be an auteur of his films. He was sure to portray the content vividly with the new techniques or style in his films. As playwright Naushil Mehta once said (in a National Seminar on "100 years of Indian Cinema: Issues and Challenges in Retrospection [Socio-Philosophical Perspective], July 5-6, 2013)" that 'film is all about story telling; that with which (the art of storytelling)

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we are acquainted with from our childhood.' Prateik Samantara noted, "His (Ray's) movies lacked any flashiness, any immoderate editing or pulsating scores. But the stories he told were very articulate representations of ordinary life, of ordinary people. In the end, Ray was a storyteller, and he did just that: tell stories, with high disregard for embellishments. His crew would often comment that most of his editing took place in the camera, and he was very, very certain about the scene he wanted to shoot. Technique was merely a means to a humanistic end."¹⁵

Though Satyajit Ray can be called in Alexandre Astruc's terminology "camera-style" or "camera-pen" and a sort of commander of his films giving a dark picture of the director, to attribute all the credit to the director of the film alone might be over exaggerating the director's contribution to making of a film. This is a strong criticism. Another point raised by British critic Peter Wollen is that the viewer's judgment that is labeled on a director by applying structuralism and semiotic theory; therefore, it is the audience who judges the director in this way, but the director like Ray makes only films of 'this type' and 'not of that type'. No doubt the director as an author of the film is important, but it is a distinct freedom experienced by the actor who portrays a particular character, though in control of the director, the director cannot control the subtle eye movements, the body language with subtle moves. If the director makes only this movie and not that, it is equally true that it is 'this actor' and 'not the other actor' for a particular role. For example, in *Pather Panchali*, the old lady portrayed by Chunnibala Devi and Soumitra Chatterjee for *Apur Sansar* as elderly Apu. Again, Ray as an auteur has been very much influenced by neo-realism; and usually the auteur sticks to a particular institution, and it is believed that does not allow him to fly high and expand his own space; (therefore like Friedrich Nietzsche) they have criticized the Auteur Theory by coining the infamous phrase, 'the death of the author'. Like hermeneutics, one has to consider why the director directed the film in this manner; his social, political, economic as well as his/her conceptual

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background are also components of his/her film. According to Paisley Livingston, "One short coming of many discussions of authorship is that insufficient attention is paid to the problem of analyzing the 'traditional' conception of authorship that is supposed to be at stake in these debates. Often it seems to be wrongly taken on faith that we already have a strong, shared understanding of what entails. This shortcoming is apparent in the writings of both anti-individualists and individualists, for neither the champions of 'the great directors' nor the students of system and structure have provided detailed elucidations of the concept of authorship."¹⁶

So, ultimately, there lies the confusion over exactly to what extent the director is solely considered the auteur of the film?


But when one goes through Andrew Sarris' view on Auteur theory, one concludes that the auteur must exhibit all his abilities and expertise in all his scenes, an auteur should have a distinct stamp or signature of his own which makes him/her a distinct director; and the connoted or implicitly hidden meanings have to be brought on the silver screen by the auteur.

These qualities of the auteur are definitely observed in Satyajit Ray.

Satyajit Ray has known to have said, "Ideally, the director should be in control of every creative aspect of film production (including camera work) because he is the only person who knows exactly what is wanted."¹⁷ This proves that Ray was absolutely clear what he was doing and he definitely left a signature of his own. Because he is considered as the auteur of his films, he produced magnificent, unique and distinct films. So, when Francois Truffaut said that 'there are no good and bad movies, only good and bad directors',¹⁸ it is (as if) aptly said for Satyajit Ray, who seemed to have 'Midas' touch' to his films; the finery with which he directed films manifested the *a priori* through *a-posteriori* (in his films).

Akira Kurosawa has said about Ray (with whom I agree completely, maybe it is my bias for Ray which is not unjustified), "Not

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to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing in the world without seeing the sun and the moon.”¹⁹

Notes and References

1. To continue with the quotation, “Beginning with Aristotle’s Poetics – a work devoted to explaining the nature of Greek tragedy – philosophers have sought to explain the specific characteristics of each significant art form of their culture. From this point of view, there is no more reason to question the existence of a philosophy of film than there is that of a philosophy of music or a philosophy of painting, two fields that are well accepted as components of aesthetics. Since film is a significant art form in our contemporary world, philosophy might even judge to have a responsibility to investigate its nature.” (Wartenberg, Thomas. *Philosophy of Film*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, July 30, 2015.)
2. And, “We are all used to suspending our commonsense views about how the world works in the context of fiction. This suspension can be used to the philosopher’s advantage.” (Litch, Mary M. *Philosophy through Film*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p. 2.)
3. Wartenberg, Thomas. *Philosophy of Film*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, July 30, 2015.
4. “Auteur theory is generally associated with the French film journal *Cahiers du Cinema*, which was launched in 1951, particularly the 1954 article ‘*Une certaine tendance du cinema*’ by critic and director Francois Truffaut which became a kind of manifesto for the *French New Wave* or *Nouvelle Vague*. The actual phrase ‘auteur theory’ originates with American film critic Andrew Sarris, who transformed the debate in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinema* referred to as the *politique des auteurs* into a distinctive methodological programme.” (Ian Buchanan. *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, p. 32.)
5. Ibid., pp. 32-33.
6. Satyajit Ray (ed. by Sandip Ray). *Deep Focus – reflections on cinema*, Harper Collins Publishers, India, 2011, p. 1.
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BOOK REVIEW

SUMIT ROY

Roy, Yashobanta, *Rabindranath - A Visionary Social Thinker*,
Punthi Pustak Publication, Kolkata 2016, Pages 143, Price
Rs. 975/-.

The book is comprehensive in discussing the issues taken up by Rabindranath like the concept of man, the problem of evils, the principle of harmony with respect to individual, society and nature, education, rural construction, environment, religion and the status of women. There is a wide coverage on multiple issues and the theme that binds the entire book is the perspective of Rabindranath to achieve harmony in self and society through spirituality. The book starts with describing Rabindranath as a social philosopher and uses the word *kavi* which is the traditional way of expressing a poet and also it holds a connotation of a prophet, philosopher rolled into one., It stands out that the poet philosopher is a man of firm faith in the basic spiritual values of life. Tradition, values and harmony of spirit echoes throughout the book which Rabindranath emphasised. The modernity is being criticized as man is governed by his material wants and passions and neglecting the soul. The author depicts the becoming and the being of Rabindranath through sociocultural background, family influences and the influences through scriptures and religious traditions. It is from the Influence of scriptures that Rabindranath got the knowledge of *Gayatri* mantra which he couldn't understand at the age of twelve; later he understood its transcendental

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