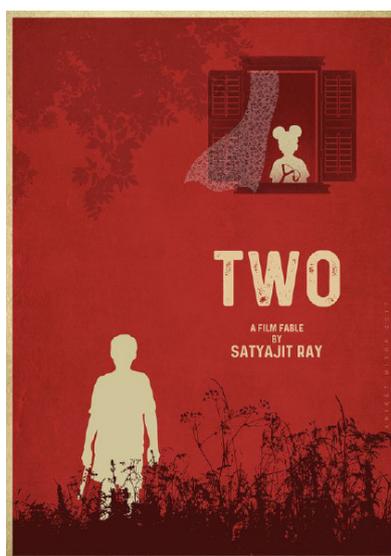


Essay

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Ray's Film *Two*: An Overview



Satyajit Ray, an Indian filmmaker who changed the grammar of contemporary Indian filmmaking style through his first film *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Road, 1955) and soon became popular and indigenous face of Indian Cinema in the world film circuit. But few films of him have been stated by scholars as ‘benchmark’ not only in the style but also in their aspects and approach to the world as well as national politics. *Two* (1964) a black & white short film of Ray is one of them. If we study well about this film then we need to look upon few matters:

- 1) Vietnam War – The war is also called Second Indochina war which was fought between United States of America and Vietnam (North). But slowly South Vietnamese, South Korea, Philippines, Aus-

tralia, Thailand & other anti-communist allies are joined with US to destroy the North Vietnam backed by the communist countries like Soviet Union. There was a stormy cloud upon the sky on Asia where the stage was prepared for the cold war in the name of ‘Vietnam War’ mainly between US & Soviet. The conflict started from 1st November 1955 officially to the fall of Saigon on 30th April 1975. Here 1964 is playing a major role for this war where US Soldiers had retreated for a devastating attack by Viet Cong (Vietnam Guerrilla Force) and conveyed a clear message to western world that in spite of low capacity and support Vietnam seems strong enough to stay in War. After 20 long years of struggle US was defeated. On that time major media houses, intellec-

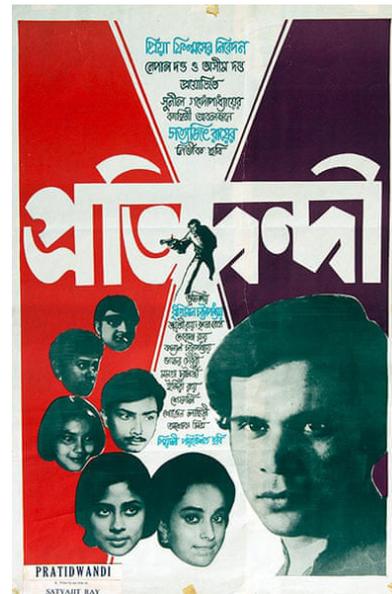
tuals, business persons were against US for the decision of this war. Satyajit Ray was one of them.

2) Indian Political Scenario – In the year 1964 Nehru died and Gulzarilal Nanda was selected as an acting prime minister for one month only and succeeded by Lal Bahadur Shastri. But situation of the country was in turmoil where oil prices and other commodity prices were going up, food crisis was on the top of the list and specially the neighbor country Pakistan started showing their weapon power to suppress India in this bad situation. As a result, India was in big trouble in terms of supplying basic necessities to the countrymen. Unemployment was also another burning problem of that time.

3) Political Problem in Bengal – In 1964 the situation in the Bengal state was not suitable. War was alarming in the border but another problem rose which was a pretty start of ‘Naxalite Movement’, an ideology which led youth in active participation. Other issue was political instability where Bengal witnessed three elections, four coalition governments and later three stints of President’s rule before Siddhartha Shankar Ray became Chief Minister. Farmer’s movement also started in some place of the state on the time span of 1963-65. Actually, those all are the game of taking ‘power’.

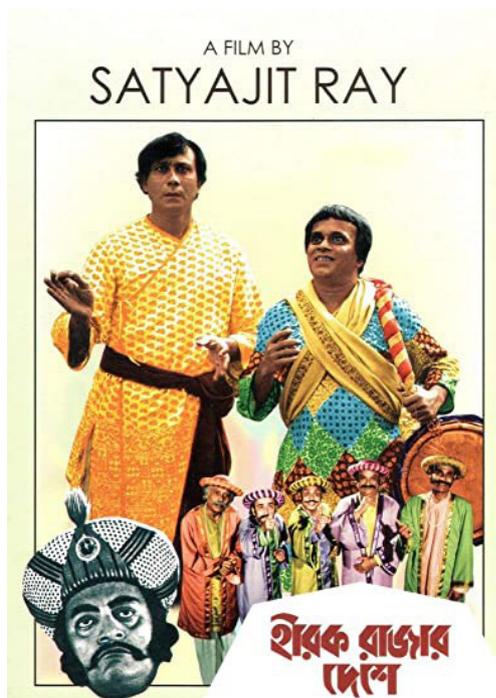
Why I am emphasizing the year ‘1964’ because in that year Satyajit Ray made the short

film *Two* which is basically a story of two boys but here is the master stroke of Ray where it symbolizes another meaning closely related to the events stated above. The apparent story of a childish fight of two children who belong from two different socio economical part shows actually the most common game of showing off the ‘power’ played across na-



tions over decades. In first few minutes Ray clearly stated his position by showing how powerful political leaders treats the world as a mere football and play with it as per their wish. How war has become to them a game just like the boy was playing with matchstick and balloon. This 12 minute film was offered to Ray from the banner of ‘Esso World Theatre’ mainly sponsored by famous American oil company ‘Esso’ in a cultural program of PBS (Public Broadcasting Service). The producers had requested Ray to make this film in a Bengali setting but must be in the English language. Ray refused to do that and found another way to tackle this situation to make the film ‘Without Dialogue’. The film is also

a metaphorical protest against imperialism worldwide by the strong nations to the weak ones and did his true duty as a real artist. That is why the Vietnam War context came along with national and state political scenarios of that time. The film was made and released in 1964 and after long years in 2006, Academy of Motion Pictures (OSCAR) authority or Academy Film Archive took an initiative to restore more films of Ray along with *Two*. Till now they have restored at least 19 titles of Satyajit Ray. Now the film is available on YouTube channel of OSCAR authority for public viewing.



Later we have explicitly witnessed this context in one of his most discussed film *Pratidwandi* (1970) which is a part of his famous Calcutta Trilogy. In this trilogy the other two films being *Seemabaddha* (1971) and *Jana Aranya* (1976). Those three films are the documentation of Calcutta now Kolkata on that particular time and *Two* stands as a prologue to these elaborated documentation. Another

notable film which is very much anti imperialist and anarchist in nature as well as highly metaphorical is *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (1980). Just like the film *Two* it is apparently a film, a sequel of famous children film *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (1969). But by now we all know that it is no less than a political film. Even the monarch is easily relatable to the present situation of Bengal, India as well as the world. In the film *Pratidwandi* we have seen the protagonist 'Siddhartha Choudhuri' was made to leave his medical studies after the sudden demise of his father and goes out in search of a modest job. This context clearly states us that the time was very much tough as I stated before having unemployment topping the list. But Siddhartha did not compromise with his ideology just as Shyamal did in the film *Seemabaddha*. Only to safeguard himself from a blame and to continue his chain of promotion he did not hesitate to arrange a false riot just like the political leaders done at that time. The Naxalite Ideology has provoked thousands of young educated people of Calcutta and ruined their future forever and both the leading and the rebel parties are to be blamed. But the situation of those students where just like the watchman of Shyamal's factory, badly beaten. This context is brought in the last film of his trilogy *Jana Aranya* where Somnath represents a common middle class educated urban youth of 1970's Bengal who after many vain attempts of getting a job started his own business as a middle man and ends up delivering a successful order but in return of his morality. He became remorseful

for supplying his friend's sister who is a prostitute by profession to a rich client which is not a big crime. But it was totally against his upbringing. All these are the sad outcomes of socio-political & economical disturbance in India as well in the world.

Apart from all these political aspects another notable aspect of the film *Two* is the depiction of art and artist. While the fight between the rich and the poor boys indicate the eternal fight between power and freedom of artist. The power may have several equipment but finally the art will fly free just as the 'Kite Scene' of the film and the power will remain a helpless audience like the last scene where the rich boy was exhausted all his toys to brag and had nothing to do but to watch the demolition of his own toy castle by his very own robot toy while listening to the flute outside.

It means a lot where director wants to portray the destruction of an industry which is being demolished by powerful political people but they won't be able to harm the artist. The person who runs the industry or depends upon the industry will be affected by outside turmoil like war, just like the robot demolished the castle. But the artist upon whom the industry runs will be far from these instability. His creation might reflect the unrest but will never be affected by the same. The poor boy's flute symbolizes the art which does not change its tune even if everything is demolished or ruined. The artist will remain a winner always. But I want to conclude this by telling a line, 'Ray is such a rare talent who had the guts to express his free thought into his cinema even against the country who funds this film which made him an ideal artist.'

Mr. Diganta Dey is a filmmaker.