A dissection of Satyajit Ray's famous creation - 'Pratidwandi'

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ABSTRACT

Part of **Satyajit Ray's** *Calcutta Trilogy* - *Seemabaddha* (*Company Limited*) and *Jana Aranya* (*The Middleman*) being the other two that followed – *Pratidwandi* (known internationally as *The Adversary*) is a film depicting the chronicle of Calcutta of the 1970s, through the eyes of an unemployed intellectual Siddhartha. Based on the novel by Sunil Gangopadhyay, Satyajit Ray shows a grasp over the changing gender equation of those times. Frustrated beyond measure, and still keeping his sanity, his ethics and his decorum intact, Siddhartha is a man caught between a family that he cares for but cannot relate to anymore, a girl who is romantically interested in him but cannot commit to him because of her own problems, and a city that gradually poses immense problem to cope with. The influence of French New Wave cinema is evident in the movie. Thus the discussion includes a detailed analysis of the film, its characters, socio political scenario, the dream sequences and other important facets.

Key Words : unemployed; intellectual; gender equation;

INTRODUCTION

This film is set in a stark background of the anarchic social and economic disruption in Bengal (growing Naxalite Movement in West Bengal), coupled with the growing impact of the Vietnam War which seems to put young Siddhartha (the protagonist) and his family (mother, uncle, sister and younger brother) in a fix, who find it hard to cope amid the rising tide of unrest and unemployment. Siddhartha's (Dhritiman Chatterjee) lack of a definite aim, and purposelessness seemed to aggravate the situation. His search for emancipation, with growing hatred mortifies his conflict with the society, as well as with himself. Torn between action and inaction, he's a "thinker who doesn't act" (according to one of his friends). Though he has strong political musings, he 'avoids' to plunge into it. Whether his feeling of

superiority is a limitation or a strength for him, is what the film attempts to unearth. Through series of provoking circumstances, he finally manages to revolt against the authority, however, it ultimately lands him to an isolated place in an undesirable profession. Thus, the film is a manifestation of literary revolution by the director against the then social structure. The film is relevant even today, as it resonates with us in every matrix of life (in terms of unemployment issue, conflict, frustration, aggression and resolution).

THE TITLE AND THE CHARACTERS

The title - 'Proti' in Bengali means – 'EVERY', Dwandi - 'one who is in the conflict' (from the word 'DWANDO') Thus, the protagonist is shown to be in the conflict (approach-approach, approach-avoidant). He always lead a lavish life, but lacked the courage to challenge his own ideal. The

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protagonist is also shown to have difficulty in coping with the world view. Since he is not being able to camouflage himself to the colour of the society, he is getting anxious, resulting in aggression. Some of the important characteristics of the protagonist are -

- **Feeling of superiority** - A grossly exaggerated feeling of being superior to everyone, which Adler believed was a defense mechanism in most people who feel inferior to others.
- **Birth order** - According to Adler (1929), the elder one is dethroned by next child. He has to learn to share. Parent expectations are usually very high. Sometimes he tends to become authoritarian or strict^[1]. For instance, he acts rudely at job interviews. "Do you like flowers?" he is asked by a prospective employer at the botanical gardens. "Not unconditionally," says Siddhartha. "Who was Prime Minister at the time of independence?" the employer goes on. "Whose independence?" the young man answers.
- **Driven by whims, yet strict in principles** - The protagonist had opted for medical after graduation in Botany, which he had to give up eventually owing to his father's death. Though he was going through financial constraints, he did not dither to sell two of his medical books to buy a Marxist ideology book. Again, he was seeking a job in his graduation subject, though, his answers were not 'kind and predictable' enough to please the interviewers. But, he did it nonetheless, showing his aggression (both Passive as well as Active). When he went to say that his sister would like to discontinue the job due to mounting pressure, he was taken aback when he was approached about his job. He was noticing the accessories of the boss, the surroundings, the lavish life.
- In spite of being attracted towards Keya and facing humiliation from Keya's father and aunt, Siddhartha succeeds in controlling. It can be supported by Malan's triangle of conflict where feeling, anxiety and defense have an interactional role^[2]. The table below shows the relationship -

FEELING	ANXIETY	DEFENSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear • Shame • Guilt • Hatred 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of being deprived • Of rejection • Loosing • Conflict between – Activity and Passivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationalization • Intellectualization • Acting out • Passive Aggression • Reaction Formation

Other important characters are Sutapa, the sister of the protagonist, who has moulded her morality in her own way. For a woman of 70's, it was considered path breaking indeed to groom herself, in terms of attire, profession and other acquaintance. She provides livelihood to the family, and does not fear of dreaming big. Protagonist's younger brother is Tonu who is the harbinger of revolution in Bengal. He has his own ideology, in which he is strict and staunch. However, he hesitates to ask for help from a 'weaker sex' (elder sister). The love interest of the protagonist is Keya who is stuck in difficult family ties, she strives for a better living, either by seeking help (first meeting with Siddhartha, when she called an unknown male to her house to fit the fuse), or she silently revolts (continuing the love relationship against her family wish). However, she often surrenders to the external force passively (Need for Abasement). Adinath is the would be doctor friend of the protagonist, who introduces the protagonist to the different colors of the society (alcohol, prostitution).

ANALYSIS OF THE TIME

WEST BENGAL-1970 :

SOCIO-POLITICAL ANARCHY

The seventies were a difficult period for India and West Bengal. Corruption rampant, the Naxalite movement had started in Calcutta. The Bangladesh Liberation War was 1971-73, it led to the influx of millions of refugees into West Bengal,

causing significant strains on its infrastructure, thus aggravating the ghastly issue of unemployment.

About his social responsibilities as a filmmaker, in an interview with *Cineaste* magazine, Ray had commented, "You can see my attitude in *The Adversary* where you have two brothers. The younger brother is a Naxalite. There is no doubt that the elder brother admires the younger brother for his bravery and convictions. The film is not ambiguous about that. As a filmmaker, however, I was more interested in the elder brother because he is the vacillating character. As a psychological entity, as a human being with doubts, he is a more interesting character to me. The younger brother has already identified himself with a cause. That makes him part of a total attitude and makes him unimportant. The Naxalite movement takes over. He, as a person, becomes insignificant^[3]." Both the brothers are shown to be revolutionaries, but their way of expression is different.

HERMENEUTICS - METAPHOR

1. SIDDHARTHA

- Siddhartha is the name of the then would be Chief Minister of West Bengal. In 1966, he became the Union Cabinet Minister of Education & Youth Services for the Government of India. After the Congress won the General Election of 1972, he became the Chief Minister of West Bengal from March 19, 1972 to June 21, 1977. The crackdown on Naxalites also took place during this period [4]. However, he used to be a 'very good friend' of the then famous communist leader, though the former was anti-communist. Thus, a conflict is revealed from here.
- SIDDHARTHA is the name of LORD BUDDHA, before him being 'BUDDHA', (enlightenment), that is, before his realization of the miseries of life, his own self. Siddhartha is a cinematographic embodiment of the Buddha : his "Middle Way between sensual indulgence (Topu and Adinath?) and the severe asceticism" of his

Naxalite brother; his insistence on doing (or trying to do) what is right, rather than what other people do. Siddhartha hears once again the bird of his childhood chirp away so joyfully, equate with the famed Awakening.

- SIDDHARTHA in bengali means – SIDDHA HYCHE ARTHO JAR. Thus, at the end, the protagonist gives up, realizes his lacuna and strives to lead a new life. In other way, he is still in quest of his existential meaning, re-considering his path and course of action.

2. BIRD

Repeatedly, a bird is mentioned, which the protagonist brings back from his memory. However, except the sound, the name of the bird or any other detail is unknown. Siblings summon their elder brother to have a look at the bird. It tends to signify a sense of dependency of younger ones on the elder one. Siddhartha eventually gets hold of the bird at Balurghat, where he moves with his new ordinary job. It shows that the bird is the harbinger of emancipation. Ray insists on his childhood; short flashbacks of Siddhartha with Topu (his sister), near a river where she attracts his attention to a certain bird-song, and in another scene, with his brother, we realize their difference faced with the cruel act of skinning chickens. His brother doesn't mind the idea of the French guillotine, an object which cuts life neatly in two. Siddhartha is the exact opposite: his life flows from one state to the next, from one period to the next; it allows change to reshape it ("you've changed" he says to Topu; "you've changed too", she counters) : these childhood glimpses are attempts to sort out the psychological genesis of his character, but also a sign that someone's life cannot be completely pre-planned. The subtle and rather pleasant sections between Siddhartha and Keya, his girlfriend, testify to life's infinite dimension.

3. X-RAY SCENE

When Siddhartha is taken to the brothel, and introduced to the woman, she asks him for a

cigarette, and then for a light. He proceeds to strike a match; she bends towards him, and the sparking of the light results in the sudden X-raying of the scene.

4. DEATH

The film opens with the death of protagonist's father, (end of his education, his growing interest in politics) and it ends with another death scene just when he notices the sound of much searched bird. It encompasses a complete circle of finis of his conflict, his ideology.

5. OTHER METAPHORS

The view of the city from the high-rise building might reflect deciding on uncertain circumstances which would creep in the lives of Siddharta and Keya.

Downfall of Elvis Presley in his career, birth of Lisa Marie Presley could be some of the symbolic indicators of Siddharta's disturbance with his career and the finding of the love of his life.

The metaphor of *AADMI AUR INSAN, 1ST MAY, AND THE DOUBLE-DECKER BUS*, with *MODERN* written on it which reflects that on an auspicious day like May Day, whatsoever society is modernized, but it still remains under the mourning of the working class (bus filled with passenger, INSAAN).

IMAGERIES

- Shooting of his sister's employer and getting jolted to reality as soon as the host enters and switches on of fan. The cool air not only comforts his sweat but extreme hatred too.
- Watching a modern woman on road, one can imagine the Intellectualization defense in the mind of medical student studying female breast.
- The childhood reference of chicken and beheaded guillotine, skeletons waiting desperately for their turn outside the interview room.
- Visualizing himself as a revolutionist after watching his younger brother, shows his deemed desire.
- Visualizing his sister dancing in a party with a man shows his own desire of being a part of the aristocrats
- Siddharta witness juxtaposed visions of poverty vs. foreign tourist embracing Indian culture. In another scene while watching that mandatory documentary before movie in which the Prime Minister was depicted as progressive PM that leads the country towards more progress and prosperity and suddenly a bomb explodes in cinema hall. His wristwatch gets broken, signifying ceasing of the time. One of his friend who's collecting the fund for Red Cross stealing it in secret and took Siddhartha to prostitute and that's another scene where we see the negative again when embarrassed Siddhartha lighting the cigarette for the prostitute in undergarment.

SIDDHARTHA'S DREAM ANALYSIS

DREAM - 1

MANIFEST CONTENT - Siddhartha being cut brutally at guillotine.

LATENT CONTENT -

- ❑ **DAY RESIDUE** - Car accident where he could not hit the driver, though he attempted; Got drunk for the first time; attended a sex worker who works as a nurse in day time; could not find the much searched bird; felt a feeling of infatuation; could not resist younger brother (a part of his own ego) from continuing to be a part of Naxalite Movement; dance of the sister.

DRAMATIZATION – Abstract ideas of Latent content is given an ACTION

SECONDARY ELABORATION - the whole matter of Latent Content is given a coherent and sensible form, (being cut at guillotine).

Sleep could not be continued. He woke up, got to hear pets shouting, which is probably his own unconscious conflicts, stopped them forcefully to go into sleep.

DREAM - 2

MANIFEST CONTENT - Siddhartha watching an interview is going on in a sea beach, many hoardings and leaflets are torn, bottles containing foetus, sister's photo shoot is going on, with the car surrounded by hooligans protesting, many police men shooting his brother whose hands are tied behind, a nurse is running who happens to be Latika and tries to touch him, but negated by Siddhartha, and eventually she turns out to be Keya, which Siddhartha accepts and the bird chirps.

LATENT CONTENT -

DAY RESIDUE - Failure in interview; car accident and the helpless girl there.

DISCUSSION

In a letter to Seton in 1970, Ray wrote that *Pratidwandi* was the most provocative film he had made till then. The film is said to have evoked extreme reactions. "People either loved the film or hated it", Dhritiman Chatterjee told Andrew Robinson, Ray's biographer⁵. "The Adversary" moves so quietly, with such seeming politeness to jaded film senses, that it takes a while to realize that for all its somberness it's a particularly moving comedy. The methods are so conventional, they seem reserved, but the director's sensibility is profoundly compassionate⁶." In the backdrop of socio-political-economic unrest in Bengal, unemployed Siddhartha who is emotionally unsettled by the (all strikingly seductive) women in his environment, his sister first, whom he believes it's his duty to defend, then a prostitute he meets with his friend, and whom he resists, and finally a neighbour who asks him one night to come and change a fuse in her house, and who befriends him. At one stage, he attends to an accident on the street, people get out of the car, leaving a solitary schoolgirl in the back seat, the music is insistent. But he turns away, leaving audience wondering.

Through dream sequences, X-ray scenes, relationship constraints, daily hassles, poverty, political unrest, unemployment, death and frequent appearance of the bird, the film surfaces the different layer of human psyche.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the film explores Siddhartha's calm plea for silence when he feels he's being lectured at, his

desire to shoot his enemy at sight, his transformation into a revolutionary in a second, his scorn for the rich and wealthy, and his disgust for foreigners high on substance, are acute observations that define his nature. Siddhartha's own search for a worthy job runs parallel to his search for a bird, from his childhood memories. The film does well to tie the two searches together, till the end. It is a way of understanding of the mind of a struggler, stuck in a Leftist state where opportunities are few, but to embrace them, something has to give - soul, ideals or temper. Although set in the Calcutta of the 1960s, *Pratidwandi* continues to be relevant considering the city's current state of affairs. Unemployment is still a major issue and the resulting psychological stress is increasing due to it and hence the need for intervention is gradually becoming even more necessary.

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