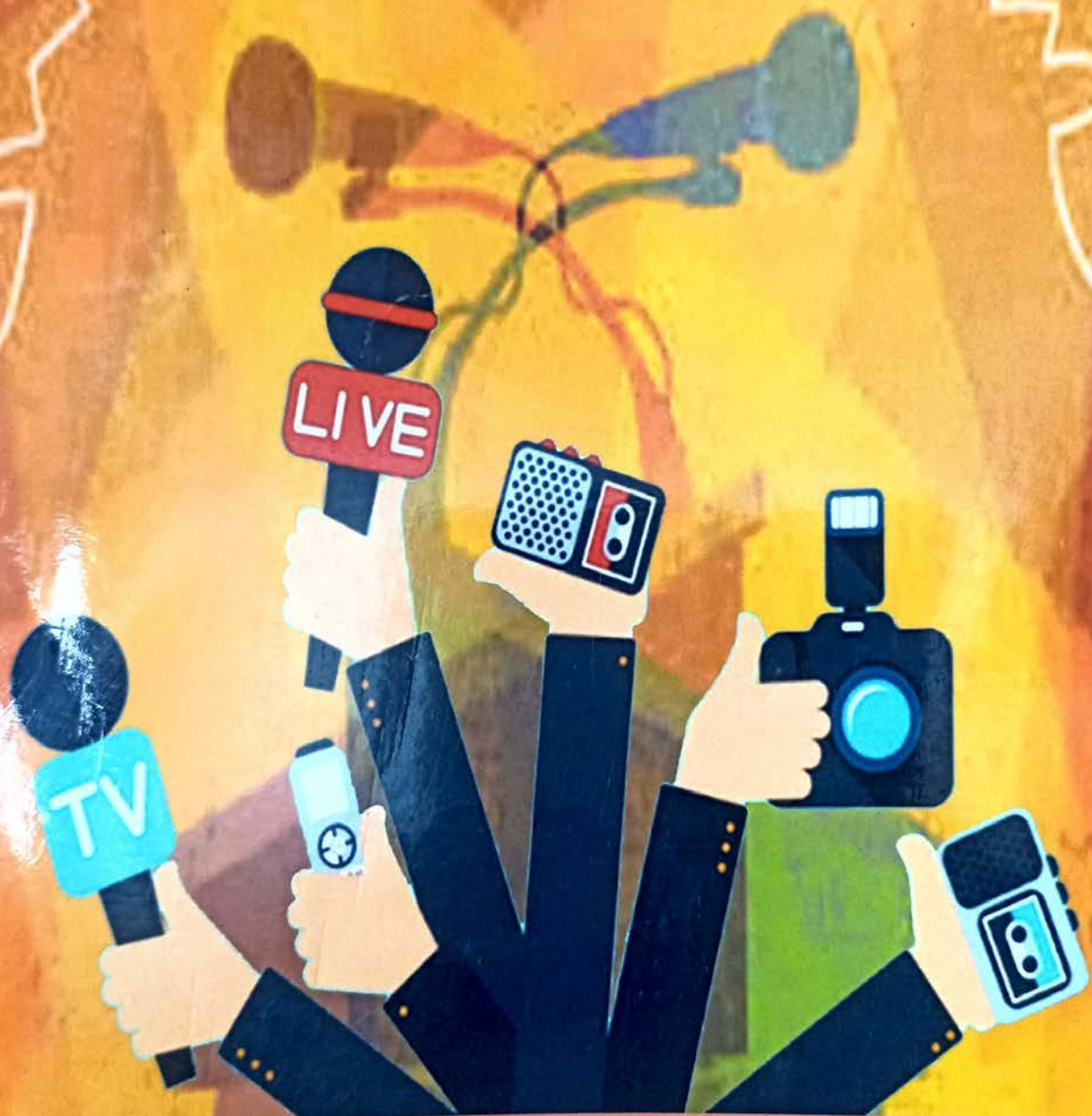


MEDIA ISSUES AND DEBATES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA



Maithili Ganjoo
Aman Vats
Suman Kumari



Media Issues and Debates in Contemporary India

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Title of the Book: Media Issues and Debates in Contemporary India

First: Volume -2023

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ISBN: 978-93-5747-151-0

MRP Rs. 644/-

Publisher, Printed at & Distribution by:

Selfypage Developers Pvt. Ltd.,

Pushpagiri Complex,

Beside SBI Housing Board,

K.M. Road Chikkamagaluru, Karnataka.

Tel.: +91-8861518868

E-mail: info@iiponline.org

IMPRINT: I I P Iterative International Publishers

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CHAPTER 12

Usage of Rabindranath Tagore's Songs in Satyajit Ray's Selected Films an Aesthetic Discourse

Subhrajyoti Kundu

Abstract

The quixotic Satyajit Ray is one of the most celebrated directors of India. His visual style fused the aesthetics of European realism with evocative symbolic realism, which he based on classic Indian iconography, the aesthetic and narrative principles of *rasa*, the energies of *shakti* and *shakta*, the principles of *dharma*, and the practice of *darsha dena/darsha lena*. [1] This unique amalgam of self-expression that recorded the changing human conditions expanding over four decades covering three periods of Bengali history, offering a fictional ethnography of a nation in transition from agricultural, feudal societies to a capitalist economy has been artistically portrayed in his films. His films show not only the emotional impact of the social, economic, and political changes, on the personal lives of his characters but also reflects the Indian declaration of Independence (1947) and the period of industrialization and secularization of the 1950s and 1960s, to the rise of nationalism and Marxism in the 1970s, followed by the rapid transformation of India in the 1980s.

If Rabindranath Tagore was the ultimate cultural figure of India in the first half of the 20th century (pre-independent India), the greatest cultural personality of second half of the 20th century (post-independent India) was Satyajit Ray. Ray was linked to Tagore through the Brahmo Samaj movement, as well as his own studies as a student at Tagore's university at Santiniketan. Ray was also connected to Tagore through his father and grandfather (also great writers) who were close friends of the poet. [2]

Tagore's profound influence on his work was openly expressed by Ray [3]. Ray recognized Tagore's prodigious influence in mentioning his personal sense of creative indebtedness: I consider the three years I spent at Shantiniketan at the most fruitful period of my life. This was not so much because of the proximity to Tagore who continued to remain unapproachable. It was just that Shantiniketan opened my eyes for the first time to the splendour of Indian and Far Eastern art. Until then I was completely under the sway of western art, music and literature. Shantiniketan made me the combined product of East and West that I am. As a filmmaker, I owe as much to Shantiniketan as I do American and European cinema. [4]

Tagore's aesthetic influence was such intense that eventually led Ray to make three films from the poets' visions. *Teen Kanya* (1961) is a collection of

...serving a larger purpose. When he was seized by this musical energy, words and
...poured forth unbidden and he remained surprised at what he had himself
...composed. The unique quality of Rabindrasangeet is its evocative flavour. [27]
Even hardcore atheists, ideologues and doctrinaires in Bengal can have no
quarrel with Tagore's songs. As celebrated film maker Ritwik Ghatak puts it: 'I
cannot speak without Tagore... he has understood what I am and he has put in
all the words. I read him and I find that all has been said and I have nothing new
to say... It just cannot be helped. You can be angry with him, you can criticize
him... but in the final analysis, you will find that he has the last word.' [28]