

## Rabindranath Tagore's Views on Camera, Cinema, and Film Adaptation

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### Abstract

From his first exposure to cinema to his engagement in film direction, Rabindranath Tagore progressively formulated his own ideas of celluloid art and expressed them during the burgeoning of cinema. Although he is regarded highly in adaptation studies, his views on camera, cinema and the cinematic adaptation of literature are not adequately discussed in adaptation/film discourses. Contrary to a general assumption that Indian cinema does not have a film theory of its own, some of his ideas can be connected with the theoretical erudition of cinema studies. However, as most of his pronouncements lie scattered in literary works, it is perhaps important to collate those piecemeal ideas and theorise them in an academic way. Given this background, this paper seeks to study Tagore's views of cinema and literary adaptation as an instance of early discourse on filmmaking and literary adaptation.

### Keywords

Rabindranath Tagore, auteur theory, camera and cinema, literary adaptation, film discourse, adaptation studies

### Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) has transcended the identity of an individual literary figure and become a heritage of Bangla language, literature and culture. Recognised as “a national institution” of India, he has represented Bangla literature in its distinction since 1913 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (Dutta and Robinson, *Selected Letters* 1). In his lifetime, other art forms, such as literature, painting, and sculpture culminated well into maturity, but cinema was struggling, especially in the Indian subcontinent. Interestingly, Bangla cinema gained a magical velocity as soon as various filmmakers embarked upon rendering his works on screen. He himself believed in the prospectivity of cinema and envisioned that his works would be permuted in the artistic dimension of

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visual medium (Mansur 2). Hence, he encouraged the visual adaptation of his works in a number of ways such as by appreciating an adapted work, permitting the cinematic adaptation of his songs, revising scripts for screen and changing the titles of literary works for adaptations in consideration of medium-specificity.

This paper argues that Tagore is not merely an adapted author, he has also influenced filmmakers by his fundamental contribution to cinema as a director as well as a theorist. It is unfortunate that though he is from time to time discussed in adaptation studies as an important adapted author in Bangla cinema, Tagore's concepts of camera, cinema, and film adaptation of literature are not adequately studied by cinema/adaptation scholars. It is probably because, unlike in Europe and America, the confluence between filmmakers and litterateurs is not well entrenched in (South) Asian academia. Accordingly, this study seeks to establish his relevance and reference to cinema and adaptation discourses from a triple-edged premise: an author-director, an author-theorist, and an adapted author.

Tagore thrived in all artistic directions simultaneously. The same inclination that propelled him to explore painting made him meditate upon cinema profoundly. In fact, his continued interest in, and curiosity and reverence for, all the art forms available in his time justifies Andrew Robinson's appellation of him as "the myriad-minded man" (Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore* 1). Since the time he was exposed to cinema, its musical cadence, stream-like pace, and the beauty of its movement attracted him. Predictably, Tagore was very optimistic about the prospective scope and resilience of cinema as an art form in its own right and patronised whoever approached him for any advice on cinema. In many instances, he expressed his positive views that mingle with the mode of cinema production and film adaptation of literature. They can also be operative for adaptation scholars and seen from the theoretical perspective of cinema/adaptation studies. Unlike other adaptation theorists, he did not write any treatise on the theoretical aspects of the modality of literary adaptation, and again unlike some famous director-critics, such as Truffaut and Godard, he did not leave behind any discourse on adaptation. However, since his views lie scattered in a variety of genres in which he wrote, including essays, letters, and novels, it is important to collate them and make a symbiotic coherence with the theories of cinema and adaptation studies. This study aims to instate the correlation of his ideas with the existing theories, especially with the auteur theory, and seeks to contextualise his relevant ideas as an instance of the earliest discourse of adaptation.

### **Existing critical inquiries**

Although there is a considerable breadth of reviews on the cinematic translation of Tagore's works, critical insights on his ideas of cinema are surprisingly inadequate. The first significant reference, in this regard, can be marked from the

fact that the leading translation theorist Linda Hutcheon quotes from Tagore's ideas – "Cinema is still playing second fiddle to literature" (Hutcheon 1) – in her foundational book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006). However, she does not elaborate the quote in her discussion. Perhaps Arunkumar Roy in his *Rabindranath O Chalachitra* (Rabindranath and Cinema [1986]) made the most significant attempt at probing into historical enquiries in regards to Tagore's engagement with cinema and his works on screen. Though the book focuses on Tagore's engagements in a variety of issues of cinema, it does not expatiate upon how these ideas can be connected to the existing theories of visual arts. This book has, nevertheless, inspired some other works – Someswar Bhowmik's *Ruper Kalpaninjhar: Cinema Adhunikota Rabindranath* (Intuition of Cinematograph: Cinema, Modernity and Rabindranath [2011]) and Anupam Hayat's *Rabindranath O Chalachitra* (Rabindranath and Cinema [2012]) – to further explore the background stories of Tagore's works on screen. In fact, some articles such as Subha Das Mollick's "Images and Imagery: A Poet's Engagement with Moving Images" (2011) and Indranil Chakravarty's "Tagore, Cinema and Poetry of Movement" (2015) seem to reiterate some of the main ideas in Roy's book.

Somdatta Mandal's "Adapting, Interpreting and Transcreating Rabindranath Tagore's Works on Screen" (2015) points to Tagore's ideas of cinema and his directorial venture of *Natir Puja* (*The Dancing Girl's Worship* [1932]). Looking into Tagore's acquaintance with and approach to cinema, Mandal underscores that Tagore became fascinated with cinema upon his first encounter with it. Tagore was, as she argues, convinced that one day cinema would be more popular than other art forms. Mandal ends her paper with a survey of the major adaptations of Tagore's works and a short vignette on each of them. Though she quotes from the directors to reiterate the rationale behind each undertaking, she does not, however, concentrate on adaptational modalities and crucial textual departures that signify directorial creativity, a major concern in adaptation theories.

Although it is an age-long argument that Indian cinema has "no theory of its own," hardly any attempt is made to formulate a film theory based on the intuitive ideas of the Indian sages like Tagore (Ahmed et al. 267). These existing critical insights, despite surveying the most notable adaptations of Tagore's works until the first decade of the twentieth century, do not concentrate on the question whether Tagore's perceptions are relevant with the theoretical developments of cinema/adaptation studies or whether his direction of *Natir Puja* fits into any existing theory of adaptation. For this reason, I will investigate the author's spontaneous ideas and intuitive insights about cinema that he pronounced here and there as a desideratum to make them relevant to the current theories, especially auteur theory, of cinema and adaptation studies. In line with this, I will also underscore his direct involvements with cinema and assess the filmmaking of *Natir Puja* from the premise of auteurist direction.

### Tagore's involvement in cinema

Despite photography's radical exposure in India from 1839, bioscope was first introduced in 1896 when Tagore was in his thirties (Gaskell and Gujral 19). By that time, his writings were widely accepted, while the stage orchestration of his works appealed to the thespian cognoscenti. Even general people positively accepted the staging of his plays and novels. However, his first encounter with camera started from 16 October 1905, a historical day when the Partition of Bengal took place separating Bengal's Muslim majority eastern areas from the Hindu majority western ones. The Bengali (Hindu) civil society angrily remonstrated against this separation and observed an extemporary *hartal* (strike) in which Tagore himself took part with a multitude of people from all walks of life. Remarkably, his own patriotic songs reverberated in the rally (Pal 27). It is Hiralal Sen (1866–1917) who made a documentary picture of this anti-Partition stand which was 'animatographed' as *The Story of Genuine Patriotism* (1905). Later on, this patriotic (partisan) visual was shown to the public in order to spread an anti-colonial political awareness leading to the *Swadeshi* movement<sup>2</sup> (Hayat 11). Regrettably, this rare historical testimony and the first instance of 'Tagore on screen' is untraceable now. Afterwards, since 1913 when Tagore received the Nobel Prize in literature, the poet not only became a literary celebrity but also a constant camera focus. Now he is an institution of Bangla literature and culture.

The first direct contact between Tagore and cinema, as revealed by Nitin Bose (1897–1986), was recorded from the performance of a dance drama at Santiniketan dating back to 1917 (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 64). Nitin Bose, who later became an ardent campaigner for bringing Tagore works on screen, was employed to record the drama performance that took place on the patio of Uttaran, Tagore's abode at Santiniketan. Bose became excited knowing that Tagore himself was performing in the play. Afterwards, on his next visit when he showed Tagore the video recording,

Tagore expressed a childlike joy after watching it and wanted to watch it again and yet again. It is interesting to witness how easily a poet of Tagore's stature succumbed to the primordial attraction of cinema. (Mollick 3)

This incident bears evidence of his ingenuous acceptance and bewitchment of the cinematic medium.

His first involvement with filmmaking was recorded in 1920 when he elatedly cooperated with the adaptation of his 1890 play, *Bisarjan* (Sacrifice). Approached by Madan Theatre Company through Dhiren Gangopadhyay, Tagore gave instant permission. What is more, he did not demand any money from the company. However, this time the production did not take place since

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<sup>2</sup> A nationalist movement in which Indians boycotted British goods in favour of locally-made products with the ultimate aim of gaining independence from colonial rule.

no female actors appeared to act in the film.<sup>3</sup> It is to be noted that the first successful adaptation of Tagore's work and the first commercial performance converged in Naresh Mitra's (1888–1968) *Manbhanjan* (Fury Appeased [1923]), an adaptation of the 1885 short story of the same name, in which Tagore appeared in the visual to preface the film before the main plotline unravelled. His appearance shown publicly in the film was well accepted and appreciated; however, the film, as per the reviews mentioned in Chandi Mukhopadhyay (13), was not appreciated as camera work; it was reported as “crude” and not artistically montaged.

However, the 1930 re-adaptation of “Manbhanjan” by Madhu Bose becomes a historic event for Indian cinema since Tagore was directly involved in the venture. He minutely oversaw the composite parts of the entire production such as screenplay, narrative, music, and editing. Remarkably, since the story was earlier filmed as *Manbhanjan* (1923), Tagore changed the title to *Giribala* after the main female character of the story. Furthermore, he made some other changes in the short story and included new characters that were not in the original. Later on, such treatments of title, screenplay, characterisation, narrative, music, and editing became common dynamics in the adaptational process and key concerns in the critical assessment of literary adaptations. In fact, Tagore did not hesitate to temper his works in order to accommodate them to the specificities of the celluloid medium. Hence, it can be safely said that Tagore introduced the issues of change, modification, and improvisation (in literary works), arguably for the first time in cinema history, that have later formed the basis of adaptation discourse in terms of inter-media transmutation of literature. It is noteworthy that he watched this film on its first show and expressed his appreciation. It was perhaps the first instance of Tagore watching an adaptation of his work at a cinema hall.

Again, in high estimation of Satu Sen's (1902–72) adaptation of Tagore's novel *Chokher Bali* (*Eyesore* [1903]) in 1938, the poet stated:

During my recent stay in Kolkata, I had the chance to watch the film of *Chokher Bali* at Jorasanko. I was delighted by the admirable proficiency of performance artists. The curious suspense from the class conflict in the novel was commendably sustained by the cast of the film. To adapt this novel is difficult because what is very subtle in it is the psychological clash of the protagonists. I hope that the film will please the cinema connoisseurs. (qtd. in Bandopadhyay 375)<sup>4</sup>

This acknowledgement of the adaptation of his work understandably encourages the subsequent adapters. Significantly, by emphasising the need of suspense,

<sup>3</sup> Prasanta Kumar Pal confirms that *Bisarjan* was finally produced in 1928 by Orient Film Company (203).

<sup>4</sup> All translations from Bangla source texts into English are mine unless otherwise stated.

Tagore promotes preserving the 'spirit' of literary texts in adaptation rather than its verbal content. Thus, it can be safely said that instead of faithful adaptation Tagore vouchsafes for a creative adaptation, which is also a predominant focus of almost all latter-day theories of adaptation. It is to be emphasised that almost all of the subsequent creative filmmakers of Tagore's works exert a preoccupying attention to capture the spirit of the original texts (Ray 32).

Apart from supporting the adaptations of his works on screen, Tagore consented to the musical adaptation of his songs in cinema. The first film which uses his songs as background music is Pramathesh Barua's *Mukti* (Freedom [1935]) in which Pankaj Mullick (1905–78) is the music director. Mullick comes to Tagore for permission to use his 1906 poem "Diner Sheshe Ghumer Deshe" (in the land of sleep towards the end of the day) as a playback song in the film. When Mullick sang the song in his own tune, Tagore highly appreciated it which was later used in the film and has remained one of the most popular Tagore songs. Prior to giving his consent, Tagore asked Mullick to relay to him the sequence of the story and songs. Pondering for a while, Tagore finally set the title as *Mukti*. Marking it a "turning point of Bengali cinema," Shoma A. Chatterji in her biography of Pramathesh Barua quotes Tagore's words:

Pankaj, I see from the chronology of the sequences and unfolding of the story that it begins with a series of doors being opened one after another. It is as if the protagonist of the story is searching for freedom from something or someone. Let *Mukti* be the name of the film. (57)

Another instance of Tagore's positive attitude towards cinema pertains to Kazi Nazrul Islam's (1899–1976) musical direction in the adaptation of the former's novel *Gora* (*Fair-faced* [1909]). A number of critics such as Chandi Mukhopadhyay (56), Gourangaprasad Ghosh (103), and Anupam Hayat (43) confirm that in 1938, Naresh Mitra in adapting *Gora* engaged Nazrul as its music director. By that time, Tagore and Nazrul had already revolutionised Bangla music through lyricising, composing, and making notations of their own songs. On the eve of *Gora's* release, Visva Bharati's objection that Tagore's songs were not properly treated in the film irritated Nazrul. Without any delay, he rushed to Tagore who felt rather embarrassed by the Visva-Bharati interference and ruefully retorted, "What a mess! I do learn music from you; how dare they find fault with you? Do they understand my songs better than you do?" (Mukhopadhyay 56-7) Tagore instantly sang on the documents even before watching the film and songs. Later on, in the evening, he watched the film in company of Nazrul and Naresh, and highly appreciated the musical innovation.

Tagore contributed to the establishment of cinematic art in other ways too. In one instance, when Dhiren Ganguly wished to go abroad to learn the basics of filmmaking, Tagore, on his own accord, wrote a reference letter for him:

I know Dhirendranath Ganguly who is [a] promising young artist of fair ability. He wants to go to Europe to pursue his studies further, and I feel sure any help given to him for this purpose will not go in vain. (qtd. in Ghosh 47)

Moreover, with the rapid popularity of talkie cinema, Cinema East Bengal sought help from Tagore to find a similar Bangla word for talkie cinema. Tagore coined the word *rupabani* (the beauty of cine-language) that gained currency since then. Later, he named a new cinema hall as Rupabani Cinema Hall. Remarkably, at the inauguration ceremony of the cinema hall, he wrote some commemorative verses, which became, in fact, a blessing in disguise for cinema's prosperity:

বরদীলাম/ হারারূপ ধরা দেবে

কায়ামুক্ত ছায়া আসবে আলোর বাহু ধরে

তোমার দৃষ্টি উৎসবে/ (qtd. in Ghosh 187)

“*Bor dilam. Hara rup dhora debe/ kayamukta chhaya asbe alor bahu dhore/ tomar drishti utsobe.*” A rough translation of the verse may read: “May your aspiration be fulfilled. Through the means of light, may you give off lucent images, dismembered from the body at your celebration of vision.” These benedictory words bear the testimony of the author's visionary speculation, expectation, and trust in cinema.

During his 1930 visit to the Berlin UFA studio, the main film studio in Germany of that time, Tagore was invited to watch a passion play film which left a very optimistic impression upon the poet's mind. Coincidentally, at the same time, the studio executives requested that the poet write a movie script for them. Accepting the offer with pleasure, Tagore wrote *The Child*, a script-like narrative poem and the poet's only work originally written in English. It is unfortunate for Indian cinema that the production was put in abeyance owing to the whirlwind of world politics and corresponding change in the status of the studio that made the initial offer to Tagore. The project was never realised. Nevertheless, the consequential spin-off from this endeavour is that Tagore's own recitation of the poem accompanied by the singing of his own songs was recorded in sound and image. Later in 1931, this sound video was exhibited in many theatres and cinema halls. It is worth mentioning that *The Child* (1931) as a short film on Tagore's recitation and singing is arguably the first sound camerawork in the history of Indian cinema (Ghosh 190). It can be assumed that this astonishing video awed Indian moviegoers and augured the path of the sound-film era in India. The poet later translated the poem into Bangla and gave it the title *Shishu Tirtha* (The Pilgrimage of Children).

By extension, in numerous places in his epistolary memoir *Russiar Chitthi* (*Letters from Russia* [1960]), based on the experience of his 1930 visit to the country, Tagore referred to cinema as one of the most important recreational media of the Russians alongside literature. In its epilogue, for example, he

recognised the power of cinema in visualising the history of mankind that instils a great (political) lesson in the present politicians (Tagore 1). What is more, he was shown a number of films, the most notable of which was Sergei Eisenstein's (1898–1948) *Battleship of Potemkin* (1925), one of the most significant films in the cinematic history of the world. His impression upon the film can be remarked from his instant plan that he would make a film on such topic, that is, the history of mankind (Sheth and Shetha 46). In view of this, this trip can be regarded as a watershed mark with respect to his ideas of cinema.

### **Tagore's direction of *Natir Puja***

Albeit unsuccessful in many of his previous pursuits, Tagore eventually succeeded in directing a film and thus enshrining himself in cinema and adaptation studies. His direction of, and acting in, *Natir Puja* is arguably the first instance of any literary artist's adaptational or directorial venture on their own work. Through the process of making the film, Tagore makes evident his poetic, dramatic, and cinematic talent since the source of the film entails his earlier works. He wrote the poem "Pujarini" (The Female Worshiper) in 1899, recast it in the dramatic form of *Natir Puja* in 1926, and transposed the drama onto screen in 1932. It can now be a relevant study in relation to the literature-cinema confluence that later became the basis and focus of adaptation theories. Tagore's film has remained one of the initial efforts of sound films in the history of Bangla cinema. In this regard, Chiraranjan Bandopadhyay reflects, stating: "*Natir Puja* has proved how sublimely Bengali film excelled in talkies even within a very short period of time" (335). Some other critics such as Krishna Gopal Ray and Mahbub Alam also consider *Natir Puja* the first sound film on Tagore's works and the fifth sound film in the history of Bangla cinema (qtd. in Hayat 25). Thus, Tagore's attempt remains the milestone achievement in the fledgling stage of Bangla cinema.

The film was made within four days at the National Theatres Studio with the director having a role of 'Upali' at the onset. Since Tagore knew that a 'thesis play' like *Natir Puja*, in which symbolism, connotative meaning, and narrative technique play an important role, was difficult to shoot in motion picture, he as director toiled hard and micromanaged the entire production (Prasad 59). Unfortunately, the film in its entirety is unavailable now. From the available vestiges, it can be safely said that Tagore's take on the film was recorded from stage orchestration, that is, it was filmed more in style of stage drama than in a conventional style of filmmaking. If the entire film had been collected, a theoretical perspective could have been invested upon it, or a new theory could have stemmed from it. It could have been easily integrated with the popular



tradition of live performance productions,<sup>5</sup> simultaneously presented to the theatre audience and broadcast, via satellite, to global cinema and art halls.

### Tagore's theory of cinema

Tagore's death in 1941 coincided with the release of Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941), one of the finest sound-era classics. This implies that cinema reached its peak during his lifetime from the silent era to the sound era. His perception of cinema also changed accordingly with this transition. In 1929, he called cinema *chhayachitra* (shadow film or silent film). Interestingly enough, with the successful adaptation of *Gora* as a sound film in 1938, he hailed cinema as *cinema natya* (cinematic drama) (Mandal 8). In view of this, I do not agree with Arunkumar Roy, Someswar Bhowmik, and Subha Das Mollick who argue that Tagore was not seriously interested in cinema or that he considered literary art superior to camera-picture. "If only Tagore had," as Mollick observes, "diverted his intellect in a little more organized way towards cinema, India could have been one of the first countries, after Soviet Union, to give cinema the status of an academic discipline" (4). Probably this type of hypothesis results in Tagore's ideas of cinema being studied piecemeal. The progressive change in his ideas of cinema as reflected in the transformation from *chhayachitra* to *cinema natya* suggests, bewildering though it may appear, that he was very positive about, and responsive to, this medium of art. If these scattered views can be organised, synchronised, and evaluated in line or comparison with the existing theories, they can be a significant addition and reference to adaptation and cinema studies.

Tagore, the artistic visionary, could envisage the pervasive use of camera even before the time when the device was hardly popular in India. He could see the resilience of human eyes in that of camera eyes. In one of his letters written in 1898, he discerned the inherent likeness between the mind's eye and the camera's eye:

The windows of my houseboat are closed. I have pulled up the shutters to take a look at the scenery outside. My *mind's eye* is like the *camera eye*. It is taking impressions of fragments of scenes. Circumscribed by the shutters, each scene is coming under sharp focus. (qtd. in Mollick 63 [emphasis added])

Mollick's assumption that Tagore did not consistently focus upon camera art (3) is untenable because Tagore had coined 'camera eye' and compared it with 'mind's eye' before he came in touch with camera personally. No record confirms it. Tagore's focus on 'frame' that distinguishes between the human eye and the camera eye determines that he was much ahead of his time. In fact, this is the camera's attribute of framing that lends artistic eminence to a photograph of a

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<sup>5</sup> Commonly known as as NT Live Productions, this tradition was initiated by Royal National Theatre of London in the 1960s.

natural object. The bard's prophetic reference to this reflection deserves proper reference to the discourse concerning the question of credibility of camera and cinema proliferations.

Amazingly, on the threshold of the twentieth century, Tagore in *Chokher Bali* (2003) addressed the artistic freedom of a camera artist and the ethical issues pertaining to camerawork. When Mahendra surreptitiously advances to photograph Binodini, he contemplates not to replicate her as she appears in sleep, but to create a different Binodini from the tincture of his imagination. Hence, Mahendra seems to take troubles in patterning her hair and ordering her attire "for art's sake" (Tagore 328). Here, Tagore's emphasis on two versions of Binodini – her original appearance and the improvised one on camera – may be compared to a literary text and its cinematic version in which the filmmaker/cameraman indulges in the creative imagination. Waking up while being photographed, Binodini retorts to Mahendra's furtive move and says that "it's sheer impropriety" (Tagore 329). What she implies is that an attempt to capture anyone on camera without their prior consent is improper. Interestingly, such ethical questions of image making that Tagore raised at a time when cinematic production was yet to take a definitive shape later become the essential haecceity in film discourse from the 1990s, especially since the publication of *Image Ethics: The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film, and Television* (1988).

Surprisingly, Tagore seems to be concerned about the diversity and independence of camera art, be it a still picture or motion feature. Despite discerning a similarity between the human eye and the camera eye, he is aware that camera artists, utilising their aesthetic capacity, can make photography more artistic than the real object. What he implies is that a photograph (read an adaptation) is not the same object (read a literary work) from which it is taken. This very fact persuades Tagore to mark the difference between viewing an object in its natural form and feeling it in its photograph, by extension, between reading literary work and watching its film adaptation. He writes:

In the private garden of my childhood, every sunrise was a wonder. Every morning, nature decked the Sun in a new attire and presented to me in an azure blue tray. I have apprehensions, someday my future biographer may come and take photographs of my private garden. Would his camera capture the primeval garden of Eden that this private garden meant to me? (qtd. in Mollick 4)

Tagore believes that the more artistic a photograph is, the more distant it is from the real object. Hence, natural objects and art proliferations have distinct charm, aura, and particularity of their own. To put it another way, an artistic photograph is never a replica of the real, but always a verisimilitude aestheticised by the imagination of the photographer. Tagore here runs parallel with the American art critic Arthur Danto (1924–2013) concerning the theory of the verbal and visual

mode of realism, that is, the distinction “between real objects and facsimiles of real objects” (Danto 574). In fact, Tagore emphasises that his garden can be a camera art to generations, but not the one that he was beholding at that time.

The question of real time and cinematic time has bred many theoretical observations over almost a century. For example, to the question of clock time and cinema time, Mary Ann Doane (2002), Clive Myer (2011), and Keep Kline (2016) respond that the film has its own time code in the gamut of sight and sound, and that a film is not to maintain the indexicality of history. Indeterminacy to time is an attribute of art which has its own sociocultural and political dynamics. They all underline that if a book reads for thirty hours, a film based on it can never run for the same span of time. A filmmaker is “to maintain the visual interest” (Myer 211) which a real-time film can never do. The audience is aware that a film has undergone editing and has “the need to move forward with the narrative in terms of visual change” (Myer 210). It is sad that Tagore who was arguably the first to raise the question of differing temporality in reality as well in cinema is not referred to in these discourses. He encounters an issue with time in cinema and says:

Time runs in cinema very acrobatically. Even if any scene in cinema refers to the real time in many ways, it becomes totally a different time from the clock. As regards cinema, time can rush forward or recede backward. Even when time is purposefully set to pass leisurely, it appears to be fleeting faster than the real time. (qtd. in Roy 65)

Tagore’s metaphorisation of time with acrobatics can be taken as a fundamental basis around which the theories of cinematic temporality revolve.

The fusion of music with motion picture has pre-eminently helped cinema accumulate its status as a complete art. Tagore’s contemporary French Philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941) attributed his fascination to cinema for its inherent musical cadence. Charles Hofmann confirms the inalienability between cinema and music, stating: “Music was always an integral part of the showing of motion pictures, inseparable from the visual, indispensable as accomplishment to films” (1). It is hardly known that before the formation of film-music theory, Tagore compared filmic motion to the rhythm of music time. One reason why he was fascinated by cinema is its stream-like attribute (Chakravarty 6). Later on, another contemporary Soviet filmmaker and film critic Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein (1898–1948) focused on the repetition of motifs in both music and cinema (Robertson 99). Today film score has become an independent discipline and is based on its principal claim that film is also a musical medium.

Tagore’s ideas of cinema and adaptation are best reflected in his 1929 letter to Murary Bhaduri, brother of Sisir Kumar Bhaduri, a devoted thespian and

filmmaker who popularised Tagore's works on stage and screen. The letter is mentioned below:

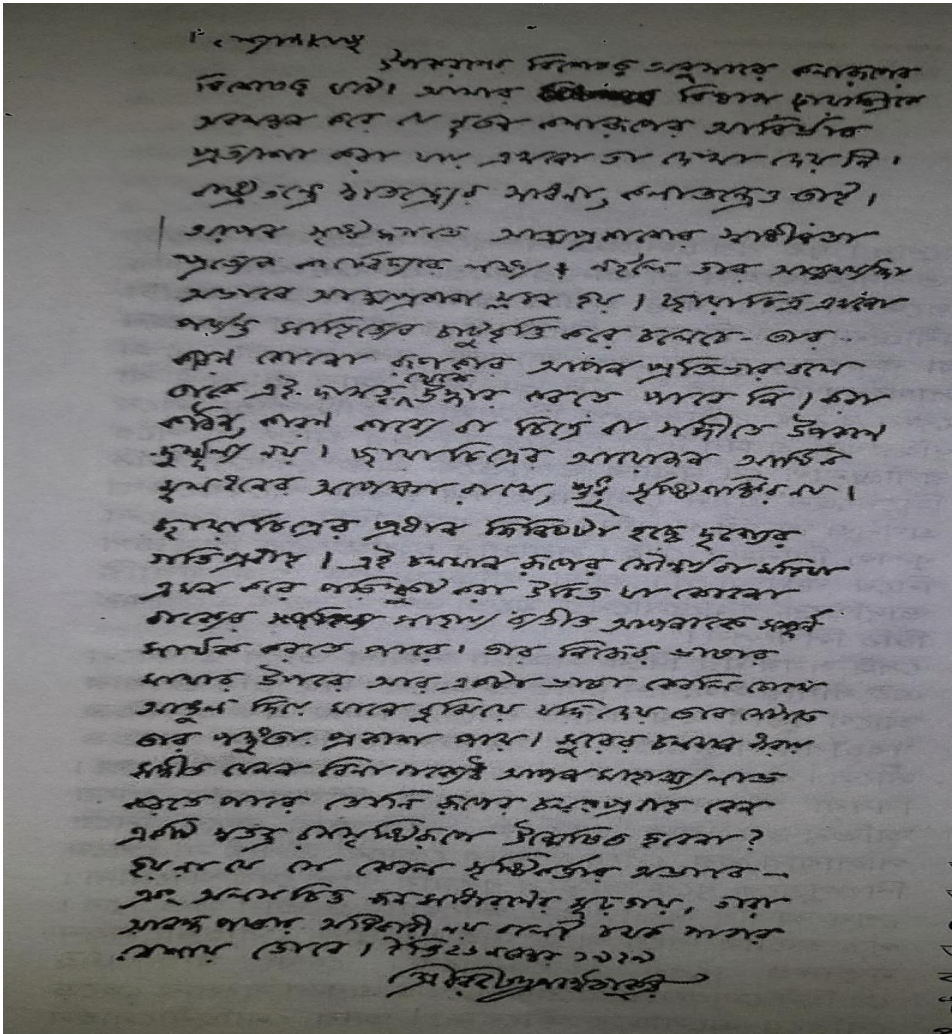


Figure 1 Tagore's letter to Murary Bhaduri (in Mukhopadhyay 18).

An English rendering of the letter can read:

The essence of art is specified by the essence of its elements. I happen to believe that the artistic emergence of cinema as a new art has not yet taken a tangible form. As in statecraft, in artcraft distinction and independence are what should be at the core. To exert its own independence in its own ambience is the aim of an artwork. If otherwise, art loses its eminence and fumbles in its manifestation. Cinema is still obsequious to literature owing to the

fact that no filmmaker of individual artistic talent has yet emerged to liberate it from its servile state. In fact, it is not so easy as the celluloid materials are way more expensive than the matters in literature, painting or music. In other words, only creative energy is not the sole factor in filmmaking; it does need finance. The quintessence of a motion picture is the torrential flow of images. The beauty and majesty of cinematic art has to be unfolded in such a way that it can be an independent art even without the use of words. The fact that cinema is explained by the language of another art and cannot depend on its own language suggests its limitation. If music in its flow of melody can attain its own magnificence without words, why shall the beauty of motion picture not bloom in its distinct aesthetics? If it does not become so, it is due to the lack of creative artists as well as the lethargic public who, unable to relish artistic pleasure, indulge in sensationalism.

The poet's insightful thoughts of cinema as deliberated in the letter can be one of the earliest attempts at building theories of cinema/adaptation studies in India. Probably for the first time in its history, cinema was seen as a form of 'art' permuted through the flow of images. In Tagore's time, the sublimity of artistic essence of motion art did not take a solid shape. He, however, strongly believed that some talented directors would emerge before long to liberate cinema art from its subservience to other art forms like literature. It is to be mentioned that before Tagore no film critic had reflected upon the independence and language of cinema. More significantly, his reflections on cinema's underlying connection to investment and audience's responsibility for cinema's success were unprecedented. In subsequent years when cinema was included in academic discourses, these issues began receiving theoretical deliberations. For example, John Berra (2008) and Ashvin Immanuel Devasundaram (2016) bring forth how (American and Indian) cinema has earned its status as an independent art. Christian Metz (1991) and Robert Edgar et al. (2010) discover how cinema has earned its own language which has been one of the core issues in academic research.

Though auteur theory became popular from the 1950s with the publication of *Cahiers du Cinema* (1951), many of its principles can be traced in Tagore's ideas of cinema envisaged decades earlier. Apart from the theoretical points he raised in the above letter, his piecemeal ideas encode the notion of auteur theory in its claim that the success or failure depends upon the creative vision and control of the director. Tagore could see that cinema did not attain its full artistic beauty because filmmakers with immense potential were yet to emerge. It is interesting that auteur theorist François Truffaut's sensational remark about auteurism – “there are no good and bad movies, only good and bad

directors” – seems to be a reflection of Tagore upon the lack of artistic cinema owing to the lack of artistic directors. More interestingly, when Satyajit Ray determines the prevalence of artistic cinema with an a priori of artistic director, he seems to be echoing Tagore's influence: “With the emergence of true artist comes art. Despite the prevalence of the artistic materials, there cannot be any art without artist” (49). Tagore's emphasis on cinema as an independent art form spreads the seeds of the idea that cinema artists are as important as their literary counterparts.

To achieve its independence, cinema must, as Tagore asserts, get rid of its obsequiousness to literature. This seeded idea later sprouted more eloquently as the foundation of auteur theory in Alexandre Astruc's article “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: The Camera Pen” (1948) which claims the equal artistic eminence of a film author alongside a literary author. This idea of cinema's independence slants towards the auteurist notion of pure cinema as pursued by the master of auteur films, Alfred Hitchcock who believes that cinema is “as such to distinguish itself from other storytelling media” and claims “cinema must take advantage of its particular facets” (qtd. in Horton 3).

Auteur theory explores the notions of individual creative vision and control in cinema. Tagore's ideas of cinema, and his direction and script of *Natir Puja* contextualise him in adaptation studies especially from the practical and theoretical perspectives of auteurism. The above analysis of Tagore's adaptation/direction of *Natir Puja* suggests that he was in full control of the production process. In fact, he micromanaged the production, exercised a total directorial freedom with his own script and music, and accepted the responsibility for its success or failure. Therefore, he can be labelled as the pioneer of auteurist direction to a certain extent.

More important, Tagore's emphasis on finance behind a film's production has direct connection to Andre Bazin's definition of auteurist film as “an art which is both popular and industrial” (251). Underscoring cinema as a “financial art,” Bazin points out that finance and popularity are two essential requisites for a film's existence. That is to say, failure to garner popularity from the audience is an obvious sign of financial loss. In subsequent auteurist discourses in *Cahiers du Cinema*, the financial issues were vital with the authorship of a film.

### **Conclusion**

Highlighting Tagore's multifarious contributions to cinema, most notably his promotion of cinema as art, theorisation of cinema, and adaptation of literature, this paper has explored his extensive engagement in Indian cinema. In fact, Tagore is arguably one of the few writers of the world who are connected to almost all the issues of cinema and cinema studies, including direction, background score, film adaptation, dance, and music. Indian cinema has extensively borrowed from Tagore for almost all of its materials such as stories,

music, and poems. It has also seen him in almost all of its production dynamics such as scripts, direction, editing, and ideas. Hence, more academic focus should be given to Tagore's ideas of cinema, and there is a need to contextualise them in cinema discourse and conduct research on them.

Tagore's directorial practice spilled over into auteurist filmmaking. The filmmakers, whose works were underlined as successful from auteurist perspectives, followed, wittingly or unwittingly, Tagore's direction and perception. As an independent director, he laid down the tradition of introducing new characters and changing the titles of the film's literary progenitor. He was one of those few savants who foresaw the artistic resilience of cinema in its very nascence and theorised it vouchsafing for its credibility, artisticity, possibility, independence, language, and music. What is needed is a unification and symbiosis of his ideas with those of adaptation scholars.

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