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Mapping the Trajectory of Adolescent Sexuality: The Portrait of Durga in Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali*

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Abstract

The saga of Apu and Durga has been immortalized on celluloid by the pathbreaking film, *Pather Panchali* (1955), the first installment of Satyajit Ray's cinematic bildungsroman, The Apu Trilogy, set in a remote village of Bengal. The portraits of the affectionate and dialectical relationship, which the brother and the sister shared, remain forever etched in the memory of the cinephiles. Apu's metamorphosis into an adult over the course of the trilogy has been comprehensively scrutinized by film scholars and aficionados, but Durga has not enjoyed much critical spotlight. This paper examines the germination, evolution, and the trajectory of the adolescent sexuality of the teenage Durga, played by Uma Dasgupta, by dissecting her performative act in the film. The paper explores the construction of the image of Durga in the film and her place in the patriarchal ecosystem, arguing that Durga is in a constant process of negotiation with the patriarchal structure, occasionally entering and exiting the patriarchal domain to assert her sexuality: she defies patriarchal protocols yet sometimes gets subjugated by it. This process continues throughout the film, culminating in her death which could be interpreted as a metaphoric punishment she received for her assertion of her formidable sexuality.

Keywords: Adolescence; patriarchy; Satyajit Ray; sexuality; transgression

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Rebanta Gupta and Aniket Roy

Introduction

The epic of the celebrated brother-sister duo, Apu and Durga, penned by Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay in the path-breaking novel, *Pather Panchali* (published in 1929), was lifted from the literary space and immortalized on celluloid by Satyajit Ray in his eponymous film, which hit the screens in 1955. Ray's *Pather Panchali*, which is the first installment of the cinematic triumvirate, *The Apu Trilogy* (the other two films being *Aparajito* and *Apur Sansar*, released in 1956 and 1959, respectively), narrates the saga of a lower-middle class Bengali family residing in a ramshackle quarter in a remote Bengal village, and its negotiations with the vicissitudes of life, with the protagonist Apurba Kumar Roy or Apu (played by Subir Banerjee) constituting its narratorial nucleus. The portrait of Apu and his metamorphosis into an adult through the trilogy not only fork-lifted Ray to the position of an internationally-reputed auteur, but it has been widely scrutinized by film scholars and aficionados around the globe, with Apu emerging as an archetype of childhood innocence and a poster-boy of cinematic bildungsroman.

However, Apu's sister Durga (played by Uma Dasgupta), who is an inseparable part of the brother-sister duo, has not received much critical spotlight. Though the names Apu and Durga are

uttered by millions to describe a bond celebrating innocence and affection against a tempestuous backdrop, the figure of Durga has largely been relegated to the background. Under the behemoth critical and hermeneutic space occupied by Apu, his sister has almost been reduced to naught, and very limited discussion has taken place on her character, especially on the pathways of her sexuality, as depicted in the film. This paper examines the germination, evolution, and trajectory of the adolescent sexuality of the teenage Durga, by dissecting her performative actions in the film.

This paper will deconstruct certain sections of *Pather Panchali* to understand how Durga negotiates with, and responds to, her burgeoning sexuality in the patriarchal atmosphere of her village, Nischindipur, in rural Bengal, under the glaring eyes of the self-appointed sworn sentinels of the dominant order: her mother Sarbajaya (played by Karuna Banerjee), and Apu, her brother. This article demonstrates Durga's emergence as a dichotomous figure in this film, wherein she occasionally enters and exits the patriarchal domain to assert her sexuality: she defies the patriarchal protocols yet sometimes gets subjugated by it, and this process continues throughout the film, culminating in her death, which could be interpreted as a metaphoric punishment she received for her assertion of her formidable sexuality. The paper, therefore, argues that the assertion of feminine sexuality is anathema to traditional society that is loaded with patriarchal

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values. Conservative rural society either tries to mold it and bring it within its rubric—as Durga expresses in this film—or it makes concerted attempts to neutralize it.

The Image of Durga in *Pather Panchali*

The word "Durga," meaning "invincible" or "unassailable" in Sanskrit (Amazzone, 2010, p.35), evokes the image of the Hindu Goddess, the paragon of beauty, strength, and compassion, who is deeply venerated and worshipped across the Indian subcontinent. The state of Bengal is the preeminent location where Durga *Puja,* or the ritualistic practice of paying homage and showing reverence to the mighty Goddess, is observed every autumn. According to Hindu mythology, "Durga was created for the slaying of the buffalo demon Mahishasura by Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and the lesser gods, who were otherwise powerless to overcome him. Embodying their collective energy (*shakti*), she is both derivative from the male divinities and the true source of their inner power" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021). Durga is an embodiment of both masculine virility and feminine sobriety: armed intimidatingly with weapons like *Chakra* (discus), *Trishula* (trident), *Khanda* (sword), and *Gada* (mace), she not only defeats the menacing Mahishasura who posed a constant threat to the divine kingdom, but she descends on the planet as a loving mother and an adorable daughter of the soil. This specific mode of reception of the Goddess is especially prevalent in Bengal which, Jawhar Sircar (2020) observes, "transformed the belligerent goddess

into a loving daughter that everyone simply dotes over by feasting on as many types of fish, delicious meat and mind-boggling varieties of sweets as possible. Yet, to be recognised as Devi Durga, she needed her motifs and had to be fully armed and in battle regalia, riding her lion, even on a sentimental visit home." The dualism, which encompasses virility and sobriety, strength and softness, aggression and compassion, is not only the cornerstone feature of the character of the mythical Goddess, but it is also reflected in the portrait of the female protagonist of *Pather Panchali*, albeit not in an identical manner.

Durga emerges on the monochrome screen as a "[h]eadstrong [girl] and completely unbothered by what people might say," who "lives in a rural Bengal village with her mother, Sarbajaya, a woman whose nagging instinct to care means she appears near-creased with worry. Durga's father, Harihar, a Brahman priest struggling to provide for his family, is easygoing to a fault" (Chew-Bose, 2017). She is a caring and kindhearted adolescent, packed with juvenile spirit and exuberance, who is a constant affectionate companion to her brother Apu, and extends her compassionate utterances toward Harihar's elderly cousin, Indir Thakrun (played by Chunibala Devi), against the backdrop of penury and destitution her family has to fight. Nevertheless, she finds pleasure in the simpler aspects of life without enunciating major complaints. Yet, she stillharbors within her an unusual rebellious spirit, which occasionally attempts to thwart the patriarchal parameters that have been laid out before her by

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the rural society, which are endorsed by her mother Sarbajaya, who, in the absence of her husband Harihar (who has recently left the village in search of a job in the faraway city. He returns only after Durga's demise), embodies the patriarchal/paternal values that seek to restrict the social maneuvers of her daughter. Her previously mentioned "nagging instinct to care" underscores Sarbajaya's efforts to manipulate Durga's acts and movements within the limits of 'feminine decency' earmarked by the machine of patriarchy.

The character of Durga was played by two actresses in her two different avatars: the infant and the adolescent Durga; while Runki Banerjee played the infant Durga, it was Uma Dasgupta's portrayal of the thirteen-year-old adolescent Durga that remains etched in the audience's memory. The names of the character and the actress portraying it uncannily intersect, as Uma is one of the names of the Hindu Goddess Parvati, who is occasionally linked with the figure of Goddess Durga in an exercise to equate two similar iconographic templates. Moreover, Uma Dasgupta becomes the real-life signifier or the embodiment of the celluloid village girl of Ray. Durga Chew-Bose (2017) observes, "[i]t's easy to conflate the two, since Dasgupta never appeared in another film, and *Pather Panchali*'s realist qualities often lead you to think you are watching a documentary." Therefore, Uma Dasgupta becomes the synecdochic representation of Durga, as if she played *herself* in the film, rather than performing *as* Durga, thereby effacing the boundary separating the fictional and the real.

Durga's character encapsulates both the eponymous Goddess' qualities of virility and gentility: she inculcates both the streaks of rebellion and maternal affection. As a daughter, she shares a conflictual relationship with her mother, inviting occasional lashes and castigations from the latter, yet she indulges in transgressive actions like the theft of a neighbor's fruits and a necklace. Besides, she treats her brother with motherly affection. She replicates her mother's role when she wakes Apu up for his school, and readies him by combing his hair. The juxtaposition of Indir, Sarbajaya, and Durga, in the long shot which captures Apu's preparation for school becomes significant, not only because it catapults Durga from her infancy to adolescence in one sweep, but also because "women of three generations are shown going about their ordinary daily routines, each separate, scarcely aware of each other, yet linked by the continuity of the take. The effect here, as of many comparable 'group' shots in the film, is of different lives being lived simultaneously, at once separate and interconnected" (Wood 1972, p.62).

These three characters not only represent the three distinct phases of a woman's life: adolescence, middle age, and dotage, but also situate Durga and Indir Thakrun on a single plane, where both of them are driven by their base desires and urges: Durga is driven by her unfettered adolescent sexual drive and a spirit of non-conformism, and Indir by her insatiable craving for food. Both of them desire liberation from their present decrepit condition and exert their urges toward the outside world, but in the process engage in an inevitable confrontation with Sarbajaya, who is the *de facto* administrator

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of the house, in Harihar's absence. By juxtaposing Indir and Durga, the trajectory of a woman's desire throughout her lifetime can be mapped, where the explosive libido of adolescence could be substituted by the hunger of old age: one mode of desire uprooting the other and colonizing its space.

The First Transgression

The eternal fascination of the patriarchal gaze to map the contours of an obsequious and 'disciplined' woman has been reflected across art and literature, and a splendid example of this attitude is the British poet, Coventry Patmore's, narrative poem, "The Angel in the House," which provides an idealized account of the poet's relationship with his first wife Emily Augusta Andrews, and sketches the image of a quintessential woman who would be the paragon of virtue, sincerity, docility, humility, and domesticity, i.e. a woman who would not destabilize and perturb the dominant patriarchal order with an invasive and anarchist attitude. American literary scholar Carol Christ finds the poem's literary value questionable, but explains that Patmore's poem "is culturally significant, not only for its definition of the sexual ideal, but also for the clarity with which it represents the male concerns that motivate fascination with that ideal" (quoted in Moore, 2015, p.29). The desire of reifying and stereotyping a woman, and interpret her from within the theoretical paradigm designed by patriarchy is nevertheless present in the domain of films as well. The preponderance of the 'male gaze' in celluloid has to be iterated, where a "woman is visually positioned as an 'object' of

heterosexual (male) desire. Her feelings, thoughts, and her sexual drives are less important than her being 'framed' by male desire" (Loreck, 2016). This act of 'framing' has been subverted by Durga from the very first few frames of *Pather Panchali.* Her act of subverting the audience's desire to interpret her as an insipid and docile "angel in the house" continues well up to the middle section of the film, before it nosedives. However, her first act of transgression—the stealing of a fruit from a neighbor's garden—clearly subverts the image of the ideal woman conceptualized by Patmore in the following lines: "While she, too gentle even to force /His penitence by kind replies,/Waits by, expecting his remorse,/ With pardon in her pitying eyes" (Patmore, n.d.).

The subversion is manifested by her appearance in the film. Though little Durga seems innocuous on the surface, her adolescent version appears to be more tomboyish, virile, and rustic; instead of feminine softness and genteelness, she appears to be more masculine and assertive, especially "[w]hen Durga is chewing sugarcane or staring off—never at some random middle distance, but far off, with a specific target—she is not just Durga but a cowboy" (Chew-Bose, 2017). Her robust appearance and mischievous gaze challenge what Patmore describes as "pardon in her pitying eyes," and stealthily she steals fruits from the garden of her prosperous neighbor. Mischievous acts such as the aforementioned one are usually associated with a boy child, while the girl child's domain is usually considered to be the playhouse populated with dolls and miniature utensils. But Durga adopts the role

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of a vivacious male child, and gets involved in this petty theft for the nourishment of Indir Thakrun, who lived the life of a second-class citizen in the Roy household. The theft unveils the daring side of Durga: her bravado challenges the socially-assigned roles and the imaginary constraints imposed upon a girl to project her as a servile and a genteel creature.

Transgression involves contravention of a set of rules or the "reality principle," which mediates the traffic of desires inextricably linked to sexuality. But desire and sexuality, the narrow senses of sexual intercourse and biological urges, are not the sole argumentative pressure points of this paper. It will define desire "in a way analogous to psychoanalytic use of "libido"—not for a particular affective state or emotion, but for the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotionally charged, that shapes an important relationship" (Sedgwick and Koestenbaum, 2016, p.27). When desire and pleasure try to express themselves, "the reality principle opposes it as an obstacle on the path to these satisfactions. From this conflict between the two structures is born a sense of unease: unsatisfied desires seek an outlet" (No Subject, 2019). The theft episode, therefore, surfaces from the dialectics between the patriarchal principles imposed upon Durga and her need to assert herself, in this case, for Indir's sake.

This scene is proleptic and foreshadows the cowboy-like attitude of her adolescent years, when her unfettered sexuality cannot be harnessed by Sarbajaya, since she will deliberately express her urges through the cracks and fissures in the dominant order, which will be discussed below in this paper. This

scene is analogous to the Biblical story of Eve's consumption of the Forbidden Fruit, after being tempted by the serpent. The Forbidden Fruit triggered an epistemic realization in Eve, and subsequently in Adam, and made them aware of their own carnal desires and nakedness. Though Durga procured the fruit for Indir, the very act of theft suggests her temptation to transgress and bypass the dominant order, in the way Eve contravened God's instructions: "… but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17-Man and Woman in the Garden, n.d.). The assertion of feminine desire has always been problematic for patriarchy, the echoes of which are also heard in the predicament Prince Hamlet faced in his troubled relationship with his "licentious" and "debauched" mother Gertrude. Durga's transgression not only exemplifies her assertion of desire to attain an object of desire, which, in the present context could be something as meager as some fruits, but it also highlights the affectionate bond she has built with Indir, "that goes beyond the usual aunt-niece relationship. Both are victims of Sarbajaya's sharp tongue and unwitting cruelty" (Sen, 2021).

Society's failure to negotiate with a woman's libidinal economy led to her being considered an "excess" or a superfluous entity. However, the circulation of libidinal energy within Indir and Durga remains conspicuous throughout; Indir's apparent uselessness, "to herself as much as to others, is made abundantly clear: she lives only for the next bit of stolen fruit or a new shawl,"

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(Wood, 1972, p.72) and all other purposes of life seem to be redundant. However, she transfers her libidinal energy toward the outside world or nature when she "is shown to be watering a plant and it suggests the nourishment of the new by the old, the intimate connection between man and nature" (Ghosh, 2017, p.85). Similarly, the libidinal energy of Durga, whose presence would apparently be marginal in the family after Apu's birth, is not only marked by her transgressive actions, but also through her variegated performances, discussed in the following section.

Feminine Truth and Masculine Fiction: The Dichotomous Durga

With all her qualities as a rebel and a potential mother, Durga acts as the North Star in *Pather Panchali*, as Apu and the audiences follow her throughout, and it is her path of self-reflection and more importantly, her path of self-discovery which becomes crucial. While for the most part, she acts as a counterpart to Apu, endorsing the age-old 'partner-in-crime' notion, her identity is triggered through certain isolated segments of the film. It is in her isolation, through her secret wants and subsequent hesitations, that Durga contributes to the most memorable tensions of the film.

While discussing the domains of truth and femininity, Jacques Lacan states that femininity in the purest sense is a domain outside the phallocentric language. While addressing the issues of masculinity and femininity, he notes that masculinity is a fiction that is structured in law, logic,

and language (the Symbolic), whereas femininity is the domain of truth, the domain beyond language and representation, which challenges the concepts of law and logic (the Real) (Lacan, 2001, p.35). In arguing on this idea, Lacan brings into play the French word *vérité* or 'truth,' which is a feminine noun and arguably sets up the notion of the very aspects of femininity and how it is inextricably linked with 'truth.' Following Lacan, one can argue that woman's existence qua woman (understood not as a biological but as a psychoanalytic category), or as "purely feminine," is the 'Other' to language, and that woman cannot entirely exist as feminine, since that would make her completely incomprehensible and unrepresentable to others as well as to herself. He, therefore, notes that women often traverse in and out of the Symbolic Order, and it is in this contradiction of sacrificing and representing, that the idea of 'pure femininity' comes into being.

In *Pather Panchali*, Ray projects Durga's contradictory 'femininity' and upholds the fiction of selfhood and the phallic myth in many ways. The very argument that it entails is her problematic character, as she poses a threat to the patriarchal regime in her activities as she also functions as the 'gatekeeper of patriarchy.' Laura Mulvey, in describing the function of women in her groundbreaking essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," significantly points out that women in the phallocentric order stand as a signifier of the 'male Other,' as her entire image is subjugated to be the "bearer of the bleeding wound; she can exist only in relation to castration and

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cannot transcend it" (Mulvey and Dudrah, 1989, p.22). Thereby, Mulvey authenticates the fact that women themselves as subjects are trained to uphold and validate the patriarchal institution "at the cost of keeping aside, or sacrificing, the purely feminine or that which is fatal to the phallic. One can say that women function as the gatekeepers of patriarchy. Gatekeepers exist, ironically, at the margins of an institution but are instrumental in protecting the institution" (Mandal, 2018, p.168).

Lacan explains that the phallus is better understood by its function than its existence as a biological organ; it is predominantly a Symbolic entity, comprising a set of traditionally inherited concepts like the notions of power, and superiority over the female subject. Mahitosh Mandal (2018) notes, "Phallus is an overcoat that the male subject is made to put on by the society, in order to achieve 'manhood'" (p.110). It implies that the whole project of masculinity is a construction and, in the attempts of internalizing the traits, one achieves the dominant traits of masculinity. The fiction of masculinity, thus, stands as long as it can maintain the hierarchy of its institution by upholding its virility, and thereby sustaining itself in an attempt to avoid encountering the feminine. The woman in the phallocentric order stands as the one validating the patriarchal institution and therefore, in the avoidance of the feminine, she is made to enhance the false sense of superiority and power of the masculine subject. Women, according to Lacan, authenticate the phallic myth by sacrificing 'pure femininity' in two ways. These are what could be called 'woman as masquerade,' and 'woman as symptom' (Mandal, 2018, p.168). While theoretical arguments

about ‘woman as symptom’ are not important for the present discussion, ‘woman as masquerade’ warrants some attention. Mandal notes, “As masquerade, a woman upholds and authenticates the phallic myth, the fiction about the virility, heroism, superiority, and power of the masculine subject” (2018, p.168). He adds, “In other words, as masquerade, woman masks, or does not trigger, the disturbing questions regarding the masculine subject’s sense of being superior to women, or his right to exert power over women, for example. As masquerade woman protects man from experiencing existential crisis by making him sense a kind of psychic unity about his being” (Mandal, 2018, p.168).

The tomboyish instinct and the subsequent rebellious acts by Durga for the major part of the film remain a threat to the patriarchal order. However, it is in the later part of the text that Durga poses a much deeper problem altogether. The marriage ceremony of her friend, which is celebrated with elaborate rituals and slow adornment of the bride with marital paraphernalia, finds a mute spectator in Durga, who watches the events in awe and admiration, and eventually tries to make herself more presentable by standing before a mirror and decorating herself with kohl and a *bindi*. Her subsequent gaze over her reflection in the mirror arguably informs the audience of her apparent identification with the marriage ceremony and a desire for the male body. Durga Chew-Bose (2017) notes, “... it’s the first time we watch Durga perceive herself, studying the round elegance

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of her face and the heavy fall of her hair. She paints thick kajal under her eyes, and it's only here that we are more formally introduced to her." Chew-Bose (2017) adds, "Durga looks susceptible and we feel it, and it becomes infinitely clear, if it wasn't already, that Das Gupta has been carrying the film forward, maintaining its force with her small frame." Her force, therefore, equally contributes not only to the cinematic axis but also to the very problematic power dynamics of her character, wherein she resides both as a threat to the masculine order, as well as a gatekeeper of the patriarchal order, espousing its trademark institution of marriage. The apparent dichotomous nature is integral to her character, and problematizes her 'femininity.'

Durga's 'look' and desire in accordance with the marriage ceremony fosters all the assumptions of the patriarchal society. In identifying with her friend and being fascinated by her images, Durga's identity temporarily dissolves; she forgets her location, the space which she inhabits. Her identification with her friend culminates in the mirror sequence, where she decorates herself by painting her eyes deep with kohl, with a nose pin, and a *bindi* on her forehead, thereby upholding the image of an ideal Bengali woman: feminine, soft and docile. The image is complemented by the lush visuals of the Bengal countryside, which is essentially feminine with its vegetation, fields, and ponds. Durga, therefore, almost becomes synonymous with the nature in this scene, and does not remain as an anomaly to the social fabric of the village. The scene is notable for the application of the *shringar rasa*, which lends a theatrical flavor of eroticism and

desire to the character of Durga, who is preparing herself for a potential groom, just like a Bengali bride who dresses up to make herself more desirable in the eyes of her husband on the first night of their marriage. This image could be linked to the amorous saga of Radha and Krishna, where the former decorates herself for her divine lover and steps out on the streets of Mathura, as described by the Vaishnava poet Govindadasa: *Kunchita-kesini nirupama besini, / Rasa abesini bhangini re, / Adhara surangini anga tarangini, / Sangini naba naba rangini re* (She has graceful curly hair and immaculate attire, / Her graceful gestures are dipped in nectar, / She has luscious lips and a curvaceous physique, / She is accompanied by her joyful peers [translation ours]). Just like Krishna remained an elusive and enigmatic figure to Radha, by the end of *Pather Panchali* it becomes clear that Durga, in an analogous manner, would not be able to make a tryst with her imagined groom, since death would scythe her life short.

Her connection with the gaze, which begins with the spectacle of the marriage ceremony, culminates in an imaginary misrecognition of the subject because the mirror before which she adorns herself represents an 'ideal ego': perfect, complete, and in control, at odds with the very first graph of Durga's character. Finally, the moment when Durga consumes the image as her own, Ray spectacularly in the jump cuts draws a crucial comparative study of the two subjects in the film: Apu, who trudges across the field, unaware of the complexities of life, while Durga performs

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the *punyipukur* ritual in one corner of her dilapidated house, when she demands a husband from the almighty. This reflects her sexual frustration; her inability to channelize her sexual desire toward a suitable partner mobilizes her desire to enter the framework of traditional marriage. It unveils her dichotomous nature; though her rebellious spirit is simmering inside, the thrust provided by her base desires makes her comply with the parameters laid down by the patriarchal society, which will inevitably curb her trademark spirit. Her apparent transformation and subsequent molding in accordance with the patriarchal setup contributes ironically to the self-importance and security of the masculine subject. In coordinating her desire and fantasy within the tropes of masquerade, Durga remains understandable and in fine tune, therefore, graspable in language. However, *woman qua woman* is the 'Other' to language, so she simultaneously remains a perpetual threat to the entire Symbolic domain and phallic myth. Her encounter with her 'femininity' or the Other side can lead to an absolute dissolution of the masculine subject.

Conclusion

Durga's constant struggle with patriarchy reaches a tipping point, when she perishes on a stormy night because of pneumonia she had contracted, thanks to her solitary act of drenching herself during a monsoon downpour. The brief moment that she enjoyed in the heavenly showers under the gathering clouds of monsoon, the curling lily leaves in the pond, and the ripples in the water, signifies hope and happiness (since Harihar's letter indicates he would return very soon). It also

suggests a brief period of liberation for her, since she could celebrate her sexuality and autonomy over her own body in an isolated space in the fields, away from the societal gaze, which has been blocked by a wall created by the downpour. However, nature seems unable to 'tolerate' her feminine assertion, and curtails her transgressive moves by bestowing upon her the seal of death; her agonizing end seems to have been a product of her desire to channelize her libido toward the outside world during the downpour, and this outward spiral of desire ricocheted back at her in the form of the ultimate punishment of death. *Pather Panchali*'s depiction of Bengal's natural environment appears to be serenely dulcet in the first frames of the film, but it eventually takes on a sinister dimension as its vibrant nature conforms to the contours of a patriarchal and authoritarian 'Other' that has subsumed other patriarchal figures like Apu and Sarbajaya, the quintessential gatekeepers of Durga's sexuality. When Apu tosses Durga's necklace into the mass of hyacinth in the pond following her death, he is trying to remove the traces of her transgressive sister from the phallic order, and thereby he retains his 'phallic pretensions,' or more precisely, his masculine fictionality. The malady brought on by the monsoon not only punishes Durga for her momentary bliss, but it also helps in the restoration of the dominant order.

The signifier 'Durga' invests the teenage girl with divine qualities, and connects her mortal frame with the eponymous Goddess, thereby initiating a process of deification of her image. This

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makes her an epitome of purity and divinity in the eyes of rural society, and crystallizes her position as a potential wife and mother, who would attend to her husband's demands and bring up her children with diligence, with the image of Parvati/Durga lurking in the background, who, in her Himalayan abode, is the wife and mother par excellence. But the assertion of sexuality on the part of the mother creates fissures in the halo of purity that surrounds her, and generates anxiety in the children, as described by Sigmund Freud in his account of Sergei Pankehjeff or the 'Wolf Man,' whose witnessing of a 'primal scene' (*Urszenen*) involving his parents, especially mother, triggered anxiety and nightmares in him (The Primal Scene, 2021). Durga's assertion of her sexuality, coupled with her search for a potential partner at her own volition (where Sarbajaya is apparently nonchalant about finding a groom for her daughter), who has not yet been approved by the patriarchal order, will certainly give rise to anxiety in village society, since it contradicts the traditional image of the Divine Mother who has almost become synonymous with Durga. She thus becomes a 'Fallen Woman,' who has been displaced from her seat of innocence and purity through her sexual awakening and libidinal assertion, and has to be disposed of to maintain the status quo. Her death, therefore, becomes an act of purgation of an anomalous element from the social fabric, where she, just like the Goddess, experiences *visarjan,* the process of immersing the idol in the water and reducing her to a mere element. Her death becomes her moment of *visarjan*, as she is immersed in the Vaitarani, the river of death in Hindu

mythology, on her way to the court of Yama, the Hindu deity of death, where her earthly transgressions will be translated into trials and tribulations in her afterlife..

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ENDNOTES:

[1] [Editor's note]: Other interesting perspectives on Satrajit Ray's cinema can be found in books and articles by Seton (2003), Arfeeen (2017), Sharma (2021) and Deka (2021).