

#LITERATURE

SATYAJIT RAY, TAGORE AND THE TIMELESS CHARULATA

5 reasons why you should watch this film



Tagore stories in films) to present Madhabi Mukherjee with elegance.

The film oozes grace in Charulata and her surroundings, from the ornate decor of the mansion to the styling of Charulata herself. The beautiful saris would inspire the modern woman to drape the Bengali garb in style, the blouses rediscovered and added to the wardrobe, the teep to be worn with pride.

But beyond all these reasons, watch Charulata for pure entertainment. After all, isn't that what a film should be about?

Charulata obviously does not fail in that. With dazzling performances and extraordinary brilliance of Satyajit Ray coupled with that of Rabindranath Tagore, Charulata is a classic not to be missed, especially for Bengalis!

By M H Haider

Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Model: Simmi

Wardrobe: Kumudini

Makeup: Sumon Rahat

Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha

Special thanks to Nazneen Haque Mimi



A generation or two has passed since its release. Here's why we, as the current generation, ought to go back to this classic.

1. It is an avant-garde masterpiece of Bengali cinema
The movie bagged many accolades, including Silver Bear for best direction at the Berlin Film Festival. Even Satyajit Ray himself has been said to say that this was his favourite among all the movies he had made.

That should be reason enough to watch the film! It's arguably Ray's finest work. Plus, it's a Tagore story. Now that's what we call synergy! Both men were polymaths, Bengali maestros who stood taller than the rest (metaphorically as well as physically, in terms of height too).

The Ray-Tagore connection goes much deeper. Satyajit Ray had met the poet in his childhood, for an autograph, and got not just his signature but a poem inscribed as well. Many years later, Ray, who grew up to become an iconic figure in his own right, made a documentary film on Rabindranath, as well as presenting a number of his stories on screen.

One such story is of Charulata, a lonely housewife's tale set in a late nineteenth century affluent household.

She loiters about from room to room. Sometimes, she picks up a book, sometimes she hums on her own. She takes out her opera glasses from a drawer and looks at the outside world with curiosity. But, she is alone.

Ray establishes the character of a lonely housewife in the very beginning of the film, portraying the gracious-looking Charulata amidst the setting of the opulent house she lives in.

She is a bird in a golden cage, spending her days in the confines of her affluent husband's mansion. She reads a lot, and has a latent knack for writing. She has no scarcity of material possessions, but the attention of her husband remains unattainable.

And then, Amol, his cousin, storms in that household one day, quite literally: during an iconic

The film oozes grace in Charulata and her surroundings, from the ornate decor of the mansion to the styling of Charulata herself. The beautiful saris would inspire the modern woman to drape the Bengali garb in style, the blouses rediscovered and added in the wardrobe, the teep to be worn with pride.

storm, a *kaal-baishakhi*, if you may. Soon enough, a relationship blossoms between Charu and Amol — the plot of the film.

2. It features a central female character

The movie is largely seen through the eyes of Charulata, the protagonist. There are not many movies, even today — compared to the ones with male protagonists — in which we see the world from a woman's perspective. In that sense, even though Charulata is an old film, it is indeed refreshing!

3. It celebrates Tagore tunes

The movie features Rabindra sangeet in its sweetest.

The playful 'Phule Phule Dho'ley Dho'ley' with Charu on a swing in a garden is bound to uplift the mood of any Tagore-loving Bengali fan. And then there is the melodious 'Ami Chini Go Chini Tomare'. The film pays tribute to Rabindranath the bard in the most charming way.

4. It gives glimpses of Bengal of a bygone era
Charulata's husband Bhupati runs The Sentinel, a political newspaper that does not shy away from attacking the government of the time. The backdrop? Bengal under the British Raj.

Bhupati is a kind gentleman, an intellectual with a fiery passion for politics, a Bengali with huge reverence for Raja Ram Mohan Roy — as hinted during a small party.

Be it the jolsha-type party itself, or the palanquin Charu observes with her opera glasses, and in fact the overall movie set with all the furniture and objects used, we get tiny glimpses of the politics and society of a long lost time.

5. Charulata is elegance personified

One can't help falling in love with the Bengali belle that is Charu. Any Tagore fan knows how splendidly he had portrayed the heroines in his novels, and Satyajit Ray seemed to take a page out of his books (well quite literally too, in the sense that he adapted

SPECIAL

PAHELA
BAISHAKH

The Daily Star

DHAKA THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 2022 BAISHAKH 1, 1429 BS