





## Chapter 5

# Between Tramline and Traffic Jam: Mapping Indian City through Satyajit Ray's *Mahanagar* and Anurag Basu's *Life in a...Metro*

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to navigate the representation of the city in the process of urbanisation and its impact on human relationships in Satyajit Ray's *Mahanagar* (1963) and Anurag Basu's *Life in a...Metro* (2007). Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad and Doreen Massey's relational understanding of space, the paper investigates how the city operates not merely as a backdrop but as an active character shaping identity, agency, and emotions. Ray's *Mahanagar* is set in post-independence Calcutta, where the city is portrayed as a place in transition, torn between tradition and modernity. Ray's nuanced portrayal critiques urban alienation while highlighting resilience. The film also presents the city as both a liberating and an isolating space, mirroring the tension of a newly independent India negotiating gender roles and economic change. In contrast, *Life in a...Metro* reflects post-liberalisation, globalised Mumbai, characterised by fragmentation, hyper-connectivity, and emotional dislocation. The contemporary Mumbai in the film captures the frenetic pace, emotional isolation, and aspirational conflicts of metropolitan life through interconnected narratives. The film situates the city as a mosaic of lives entangled in ambition, love, and loneliness, revealing the psychic costs of urban anonymity. While Ray captures the tension of a newly urbanising India, Basu's work mirrors the complexities of globalisation and fractured relationships in a neoliberal city. This paper employs a comparative lens to explore how evolving cinematic urbanisms in Indian films reflect changing social values, economic realities, gendered dynamics of life, and the city as a space of negotiation across decades.

**Keywords:** Cinema, City, Representation, Urbanisation, Gender, Space

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## 5.1 Introduction

“They walk...they are walkers. whose bodies follows the thick and thins  
Of an urban text they write without being able to read it”.

These are the famous lines by Charles Dickens, a renowned nineteenth-century novelist who vividly captured the essence of urban life in his novels. The lines portray density and confusion, the impenetrable complexity of the city, in tales that frequently centre on moral confusion. The city and cinema have a fascinating association, making it complex to examine them from different intellectual vantage points. American sociologist Robert E. Park has rightly opined that the city is a state of mind. The city and its cinematic portrayal have become central to discussions of space in contemporary social theory and other interlocking discursive domains, as they relate to what Adorno called ‘culturescape’. The evolution of the city can be identified in three phases: commercial cities, industrial cities, and post-industrial cities. The third phase, however, has often been termed corporate or world cities (Bell, 1973). The artistic portrayal of post-industrial cities in literature or cinema has challenged a different set of rhetorical strategies and styles of disposition. ‘City’ as a generic term denotes an interesting set of meanings. Robert E. Park comments on the set of meanings which a city connotes by stating:

The city is something more than a congeries of individual men and social conveniences—streets, buildings, electric lights, tramways, and telephones, etc., and administrative devices—courts, hospitals, schools, police, and evil functionaries of various sorts. The city is rather a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of the organised attitudes and sentiments that inhere in these customs and are transmitted with this tradition. The city is not, in other words, merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction. It is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it; it is a product of nature, and particularly of human nature. (Park, 1915, pp 557-612)

This commentary shows how the representation of cities in films effectively captures urban experience. Lewis Mumford (1938) makes a similar point, stating, “Mind takes form in the city; and in turn, urban forms condition mind”. If the city is a state of mind, and this state finds expression in cinema, the culture of both city and cinema becomes integral and assumes a very important role. The association between city, cinema, and culture is as complex as it is interesting. The city is not only a creation of culture but also a producer of culture. As producers of social modernisation, cities influence and shape the evolving patterns of culture even as they reflect certain essential currents of those cultures. Although the words ‘city’ and ‘culture’ have Latin roots, in many Asian languages, the word ‘city’ carries the meaning of cultural refinement and elegance. To read a city, in terms of its cultural inheritance, is to gain vital access to the deeper layers of the culture that these cities produce. Roland Barthes states that “everything as writing and in a literary text, the city becomes a galaxy of signifiers” (Barthes, 1982, pp.30). Films, like cities, are both products and producers of culture. If we look closely at the patterns that these signs produce and decode the meaning produced by the film, we will be able to enter the inner sanctums of the culture produced through those films.

## 5.2 Portrayal of the City through Films

Films have become one of the most important forms of cultural studies. The cityscape and the screening have long been interconnected. Films have become an archive in which changes in landscapes can be traced. The metamorphosis of cities can be identified throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by evaluating the tropes and narrative conventions that shape films about urban settings. Cities are complex spaces that are constantly changing and synthesising, adding dynamism. Cities can broadly be divided into two categories. On the one hand, a city serves as a background, and on the other, it acts like an actor, generating the excitement and frenzy that characterise the film. The impact that films have on structuring the city has led to the formation of Cinematic Urbanism, which presents the urban history of modernity and post-modernity through the optical lens of cinema, juxtaposing filmmaking and urban mapping. There is a symbiotic relationship between cinema and the cityscape, in which the city is constructed like the cinematic form and vice versa, as cinema also owes much of its characterisation to the historical growth of the urban space. The urban city has also occupied an ambivalent position in the Indian nationalist imaginary throughout the process of nation-building, often as a confrontational as well as contemplative space that signifies 'modernity'.

As the world of cinema evolved, so did the spatial imagination of the city. With the rise of globalisation and rapid urbanisation in the 20th and 21st centuries, films began to portray a more nuanced understanding of space. The urban landscape became a mirror of societal complexities, and films began to circulate around issues of class, gender, race, and migration. According to Benjamin, "the city is undeniably shaped by the cinematic form and the cinematic city corresponds to profound changes in the perceptible apparatus - changes that are experienced on an individual scale by the man in the streets in a big city and traffic" (Benjamin, 1936, p. 250). In the words of Hansen, "the cinema as a technique registered a shift in the field of human perception. One that worked to sensitise people to aspects of the world that were previously unnoticed: that were not previously recognized or even recognisable as reality" (Hansen, 1999, p. 59). In the Indian context, the city is often portrayed as a heterotopic space, where the real and the imagined take place simultaneously, yet, though grounded in geography, they transcend into the symbolic realm. Satyajit Ray's *Mahanagar* (1963) offers a subtle yet powerful depiction of Calcutta as both a physical city and a psychological space. Here, the city is not merely a backdrop but a catalyst that shapes the protagonist Aarti's experiences and identity. Aarti's mobility within the city is emblematic of a city in transition. Similarly, in Anurag Basu's *Life in a...Metro* (2007), Mumbai is framed from a kaleidoscopic view, through a milieu of intersecting narratives. Anurag Basu's characters are very different from Satyajit Ray's protagonist in *Mahanagar*. Basu's characters are constantly in a state of motion, for physical, emotional, or professional needs. But they rarely connect. This urban mobility becomes frenetic and ultimately causes an effect of alienation. This is what Marc Auge calls "non-places", spaces of transience and anonymity.

Both films offer distinct thematic representations of urban space in Indian cinema. On the one hand, Ray explores the gender politics of the urban space as it transforms into a modern space against a post-colonial backdrop. Basu's film, on the other hand, captures the affective fragmentation and existential uncertainties of a neoliberal society. Together, they map the trajectory of how Indian cinema is presented and negotiated, not as a passive receiver but as a

complex, dynamic 'character' shaping identities, relationships, and social realities. It is through the fluidity of images in cinema that cities are not merely lived in but become part of us, often constructed and contested, and in turn become enduring symbols of both the promises and paradoxes of modern urban life.

### 5.3 The City as Lived Space in *Mahanagar*

Satyajit Ray's film *Mahanagar* (The Big City, 1963) explores post-independence Calcutta. In the film, however, Calcutta is consistently depicted as a rapidly transforming space of controversy and struggle. Calcutta appears as a frame of reference that shifts from the periphery to the centre. Set against the backdrop of the Bengal Renaissance, a period marked by intellectual and socio-cultural development and innovation, the city in Ray's film is a place of numerous possibilities, translated and transformed across different socio-cultural milieux. The city is framed as living and emotionally charged, intertwined with questions of gender, mobility, and middle-class identity. The city becomes much more than a living space, influencing the characters' decisions, choices, and journeys, which in turn become the spirit of the city. As the famous lyricist Amitabha Bhattacharya reminds us, "...And to Satyajit Ray, Calcutta is much more than a living presence. It is in his bloodstream." The city becomes a space where human bodies and memories intersect, raising pertinent questions about how it becomes a melting pot of dreams, where hope and aspirations are on one hand and, on the other, their shattering. In *Mahanagar*, Aarti, a middle-class housewife who steps into the outer world to support her family through a crisis, becomes a key figure through which the film articulates how urban space is experienced, negotiated, and resisted. Henry Lefebvre, in his seminal work *The Production of Space*, states that space is not a neutral container but a socially produced and ideologically charged construct. His triad model divides space into three interrelated dimensions: spatial practice (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space), and representational space (lived space). Lived space refers to a space experienced through everyday life, emotions, and symbolic associations. It is a space occupied by inhabitants and users; these spaces are often filled with images, memories, and personal meaning, rather than abstract plans or physical layouts (Lefebvre, 1991). Drawing on Lefebvre's concept of space, we can infer that the city in *Mahanagar* not only acts as an external agent but is also an important terrain that shapes Aarti's personal journey. Calcutta becomes a space of the protagonist's agency and freedom. Trams, office buildings, congested streets, and marketplaces in Calcutta do not merely exist passively but reflect Aarti's evolving identity. For Aarti, Calcutta becomes a space of aspiration, hope, and dreams; while for her father-in-law, an old idealist teacher, it becomes a transforming city, symbolically representing the degeneration of his values and ideologies. Through these contradictory ideologies, opposing identities of the characters are generated against the cityscape. The interaction between physical spaces, such as streets, offices, and homes, helps shape the characters' ideologies and emotions. Thus, in the city space, dominant ideologies are shattered, making way for new debates and visibilities. In the film, the transformation of domestic and public spaces against the backdrop of the post-independence scenario helps transform Aarti, especially from her confined domestic life to the bustling workplace in Calcutta.

Doreen Massey offers a complementary yet distinctive view in her work *Space, Place and Gender*. She presents an understanding of space that should not be viewed as fixed or inert, but as relational, dynamic, and plural (Massey, 1994). She emphasises the development of space through constant interactions and the redefinition of social and political relations, particularly gender. The geographical model treats space as passive, but Massey perceives it as a “simultaneity of stories so-far”, which becomes a process rather than a product. In *Mahanagar*, Aarti’s mobility is intertwined with her evolving gender norms and class expectations. In the post-partition world of *Mahanagar*, Aarti tries to gain a job to support her family, despite the restrictions she faces from her husband and father-in-law. The city here negotiates the personal and the political, the home and the world. For Aarti, Calcutta becomes a space that opens up new avenues of opportunity and is liberating. Spaces are often contested and conflicted, where the old and new fight for their existence. Spaces are written to create new meanings and ways of life and do not necessarily intend to erase the older space completely. Ray’s film has a recurrent motif of older and newer spaces battling together for their co-existence.

In *Mahanagar*, Aarti’s father-in-law laments the degeneration of Calcutta, the city he can no longer recognise, as traditional morals are being shattered and new ones are emerging. There is a tone of condemnation as he thinks the new morals make her daughter-in-law take up a job outside the domestic periphery and the woman of the house meets the household’s economic needs. *Mahanagar* has an interesting episode in which, after returning from her office, a space symbolising her newfound freedom and agency, Aarti narrates excitedly to her husband about her boss and how he has appreciated her promptness and efficiency. To this enthusiastic banter, her husband sarcastically questions whether he would recognise her in the same way even at home. He justifies his comment by stating that Aarti seems changed and unrecognisable after finding her freedom and agency in the contested space of Calcutta. At this, Aarti, bringing her face close to her husband’s, says she is the same, “the wife of the house!” This becomes a moment of reiteration of her identity, where she validates the old and the conventional at the same moment when she has just started to experience the space that the new, big city has opened for her. This becomes the ‘translated’ nature of the city space. Amitabha Bhattacharya observes that Calcutta often appears as a frame of reference, sometimes as an adversary, often in the background, and sometimes as dominant in Ray’s films. Individual beings live and survive, sometimes innocently and sometimes acquiescing, in a society that is fast changing (Bhattacharya, 1990, p. 301). This reveals how space becomes a central force in shaping identity, agency, and the reception of the film.

#### **5.4 Gender and Urban Mobility in *Mahanagar* and *Life in a...Metro***

Contemporary Indian cinema offers a topography of postmodern culture and society, with the potential for transition in the nature and appearance of people who live in larger cities. In terms of urban mobility, men and women experience and move around the city in markedly different ways. There is a fundamental difference in the movements performed by men and women, attributable to the environment, accessibility, and the sense of security in public space. This is well rooted in the concept of gender roles in successive societies, in relation to societal and cultural history. Gender relations have an impact on the urbanisation process, affecting migration

decisions, housing structures based on family roles, and community organisations. City planning can help reorganise these relationships. Therefore, a look oriented to the specificities of each gender is so important for urban planning and studies on mobility in the city (Lemon et al., 2017). Often men find it easier to navigate the urban space because of their gendered authority, whereas women find it difficult to mobilise within it, often constrained by cultural expectations, family structures, and surveillance. In *Mahanagar*, Aarti's decision to join the workforce and traverse Calcutta on her own marks a significant transgression of gender norms in post-independence India. It reflects Aarti's journey from *antarmahal* to the *bahirmahal*, where the city is identified as the external space or the *bahirmahal*, which is largely dominated by men. The *antarmahal*, on the other hand, is a space designed for women to live and look after. Aarti's presence in public spaces such as public transport, the office, and the marketplace challenges the assumption that women are only meant to be confined within the domestic sphere. Aarti doesn't merely roam about the streets of Calcutta, but she inhabits it. She leaves an imprint of her emotions upon it and gradually tries to make meaning out of it. These spaces, which she navigates, are unfamiliar and intimidating to her, but her experiences make these spaces a site of self-realisation. Aarti's spatial agency emerges through negotiation and quiet resistance rather than open defiance, making her act of mobility through the city a political act outside the confines of gendered norms. Women's access to space has been historically contingent and often requires legitimisation through different acquired roles in employment, family duties, or respectability. In Aarti's case, her mobility is legitimised by her financial agency, leading to her personal and moral euphoria. This also unsettles the rigid binaries of public/male and private/female. Thus, the film critiques the gender implications while depicting them through urban mobility.

In *Life in a...Metro*, the experience of urban mobility becomes a challenge to engage with the emotional consequences of hyper-mobility in the city. The female characters in the film, such as Sikha (Shilpa Shetty), Shurti (Kangana Ranaut), and Neha (Konkana Sen Sharma), are employed and spatially independent, or have a history of employment, as in Sikha's case. However, their mobility is haunted by emotional fragmentation, isolation, and moral ambiguity. Unlike Aarti, these women inhabit the neoliberal city, where freedom doesn't necessarily translate into empowerment. The city of Mumbai is constantly in motion, be it trains, cars, elevators, or footbridges. But for women, this movement doesn't mean agency or authority; instead, it leads to exhaustion, relational instability, and internal dilemmas. Women are caught in the web of marriage, deception, and the desire to be loved. Love is measured against the diffused connotations of sexuality in urban space, seeking legitimacy in the man-woman relationship, as well as forming social engagement and a self-conscious penchant for identity. The characters' mobility is not for survival or economic stability, but it imbues a sense of alienation, pointing to the limitations of urban freedom in a post-liberal society. While *Mahanagar* ends with an optimistic image of Aarti having her foot intact in the public sphere, *Life in a...Metro* leaves its women caught in the vicious circle of disconnection and unresolved desire. Therefore, both films represent how gender navigates spatial experiences. If *Mahanagar* depicts the threshold moment when women began to work in the public sphere, challenging gendered roles and the confinement of domesticity, *Life in a...Metro* reflects the complex aftermath of that mobility, particularly depicting commercialisation, emotional alienation, and ambivalence. Together, these

two films map the trajectory of how Indian cinema responds to the evolving gendered nature of spatial mobility, revealing the intersections of gender, city, and cinematic narration.

### **5.5 Emotional Cartography in *Life in a...Metro***

It is often observed that in narratives, spaces have their own power to be known and critiqued. With regard to Gotham, Reckner has observed that "Gotham serves as a touchstone for contemplating the emergence of a distinctly urban, bourgeois rhetoric of the relationship between poverty, race, and criminality in the nineteenth century" (Reckner, 2001). There are very perceptible examples not only in narratives but also in the reality controlled by spatial development. This power, which the space or the background holds, is not unidimensional, but rather multidimensional and also has a multi-discursive identity. Panayiotou has noted that "space is not gender neutral; on the contrary, it can be said that all spaces are gendered spaces" (Panayiotou, 2015). When examined through the perspective of a cinematic lens, the transparency of the background is decreased and it becomes opaque and thus exercises more power. Talking in terms of gender, the relationship is two-sided. Space dictates the performance of the individual within it, making the identity within a space a performative identity. It is often observed that gender is significantly challenged and distorted by different spaces which impose a certain performance on a person. This is what is regarded as 'spacing of gender'.

*Life in a...Metro* (2007) offers a realistic cinematic portrait of contemporary Mumbai in 2007. It not only presents the city of dreams that Mumbai is to the audience but also depicts Mumbai as a cartographer of emotions, fragile relationships and quiet despair. Before delving into the analysis of the cinematic representation and urban mapping, it is important to consider Indian cinema's turning point in the 1990s, with the advent of globalization and the wake of neo-liberalization. Ranjani Mazumdar observes the shift of focus to metropolitan cities in her work *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City*. She states, "the new landscapes of urban spaces resulting from the expansion of industrial capitalism not only shaped the transition to a modern way of being in the world but were also impacted by the culture of modern" (Mazumdar, 2007, p.19). This modern cultural turn primarily signified the classes that were employed and the middle class and their dependents. In the film, it can be observed that both the male and female characters are influenced by external forces of consumerist, capitalist, secularist behaviour, and their identities are subjected to moral flux, guilt, liaisons and emotional dependency. Each narrative in the film is tied to the thread of emotional estrangement, whether it may be Shikha, the vulnerable Monty, or the conflicted Neha.

In the film, Mumbai becomes a space traversed by feelings as much as by vehicles, a city where psychological landscapes are juxtaposed with urban geographies. The significant spaces in the film are the old-age home, Rahul's flat, the call centre, Monty's office, Ranjit's house, and the railway station, all of which become part of the characters' inhibited emotions. Drawing on Lefebvre's theory of lived spaces, we can see that the film is filled with affective resonance. The local train where Shikha meets her new friend in the city, the office where Neha navigates an illicit relationship with her married boss, and the hospital room where emotional truths unravel are not merely backdrops but signified spaces that encode and decode personal histories and the

characters' emotional states. Mumbai, here, is not only a city but many coexisting cities with urban imaginaries.

While analyzing spaces as centres of personal history, *Life in a...Metro* has not only examined the gendered politics of space in the experiences of heterosexual relationships but also drawn a nuanced portrayal of a homosexual relationship. Shruti's character, performed by Konkona Sen Sharma, navigates the pressures of urban city life and her desire for love. As an unmarried woman, she constantly feels the pressure to marry, and in a state of insecurity and longing for love, she enters a romantic relationship marked by deception and superficiality. When Shruti confronts the truth about her partner's homosexuality, as an audience, we not only respond to Shruti's trauma and pain but also recognize the identity-blindness that people of alternate sexuality are situated within. On the one hand, the city is identified as a symbol of freedom and liberation, and on the other, the gendered marginalization of people of alternative sexuality situates them in a closet within that very city. After Shruti's confrontation with her partner's sexuality, in a moment of frenzy, she accuses him in a public/office space. Through her character, Basu portrays the reality of women as well as men of alternate sexuality, trapped in dominant heterosexual marriages to survive in society. The film uses this subplot to critique societal prejudices and the taboo surrounding queer relationships in urban India.

While Monty, the solitary radio producer, interacts with the city as a listener, Shikha, on the other hand, navigates a trapped marriage, embodying the city's ambivalent promise of escape and entanglement. Shikha's identity is suppressed by her marital duties. She endures constant emotional neglect from her husband, and his infidelity leaves her lonely. She gave up her career because of her incessant need to fulfil the trichotomous woman-wife-mother role. In the isolation of the chaotic city of Mumbai, Shikha transgresses the image of the ideal woman for a brief period when she meets Akash. Symbolically, the overcrowded roads and trains in the bustling city of Mumbai emerge as liberating and spacious for Shikha, in contrast to the domestic space in her house. She finds her individuality in her encounters with Akash, who reminds her of her lost aspirations and a sense of self. Each of the characters undergoes a unique experience, yet their paths intersect at various points. Every character's life not only crosses others' tangentially, but they also share a collective emotional connection marked by isolation amidst the crowd. The film has a non-linear narrative and coalesces into a single spatial and emotional perspective. Every character has a different perspective on the city of Mumbai, distinct from the others, layered by individual experience, longings and dilemmas. These fragmented depictions echo the postmodern condition of urban living: emotional disconnection in a hyper-connected world.

Therefore, through overlapping narratives, the symbolic use of space, and affective aesthetic choices, *Life in a...Metro* offers a complex portrait of Mumbai's emotional turmoil, one that resists singular meaning and instead embraces multiplicity. There is an interplay of space and gender that seems to be shaped by the urban setting of the metropolis. It further reveals how space is lived, contested, and emotionally constrained by urban subjects negotiating identity, connections, and survival. The film exemplifies how Indian cinema has shifted from portraying the city merely as a stage for social mobility to portraying it as a deep emotional labyrinth, shaped not only by its infrastructure and policy but also by memories, experiences, longing, and unresolved desire. In this emotional roller coaster of the city, every lift becomes a confessional booth, every metro ride

is a moment of reckoning, and every rooftop holds a fragile hope for intimacy amidst the city's noise.

## 5.6 Contrasting Temporalities: Post- Independence vs Post-liberalization City

*Mahanagar* and *Life in a...Metro* have created two distinct temporal contexts for the city. *Mahanagar* belongs to the early era of Independence, a period marked by a shift from Nehruvian socialism to a nationalist progression emphasizing self-reliance and industrialization. In this context, the city is a nascent zone that shatters old traditions and builds fragile modern ideals. In contrast, *Life in a...Metro* is set in the post-1991 era, when India was embracing neo-liberal policies, global capitalism, rapid privatisation, and technological advancement. These two temporalities, one in the post-independence period and the other in the post-liberalization era, not only shape the cinematic endeavour but also exert a significant influence on subjectivity, social relations, and emotional economies.

In *Mahanagar*, Calcutta is depicted as a city of transition. It bears the historical footprints of its colonial past while slowly absorbing the pulse of modern employment and public mobility. There is an estrangement and a sense of isolation, characteristic of most modern cities. Ray's camera flows through the entanglement between humans and the city. The moments of negotiation and metamorphosis often leave the audience baffled by how the city influences human lives. The characters in the film cannot be imagined without the cities - Calcutta and Mumbai - that flow and feed into their identities, 'making new' the old and transforming lives to fit into the city. In contrast, *Life in a...Metro* presents Mumbai as a city perpetually in flux, where time is compressed and emotions are transient. The changing role of technology also offers a very different and fresh perspective in both films. In *Mahanagar*, technology such as a typewriter, a fan, and a tram sets the pace of life, allowing the characters to dwell on their emotions and decisions. In *Life in a...Metro*, technology is omnipresent in the form of mobile phones, laptops, elevators, and radio broadcasts. These objects mark an accelerated life that mediates and distorts life and relationships. Therefore, the city's technological advancement and infrastructure reflect and reproduce its temporal anxiety, where constant connectivity often leads to emotional alienation.

Finally, both films critique society. Ray critiques rigid traditions and moral adaptation in a changing society. Basu, however, critiques the illusion of progress and emotional fulfilment under the mask of a neoliberal society, exposing the real face of consumerist modernity. While at the end, *Mahanagar* locates hope in personal agency and evolving relationships, *Life in a...Metro* offers a more ambivalent narrative of urban life, where agency exists but it undermines structural precarity and emotional fatigue. Thus, the temporal contrast in both films showcases how Indian cities have been imagined differently in cinema across two eras. Ray's post-independence Calcutta is a space of tension due to rapid growth and transformation. Basu's post-liberalization Mumbai is a city in emotional dissolution - a space of motion without progress, connection without commitment. Therefore, the two films offer a spatial understanding of an evolving chronotype that captures the dreams, disillusionment and affective intensities of their time.

## 5.7 Conclusion

While tracing the history of urban spaces and their imaginative impact, Sherry Simon reminds us of the many connections that have been made between urban space and its power over the imagination in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Simon, 2011). Here, the city is intimate and oppressive, yet emancipatory, a lived space that resembles the spatial triad of Henry Lefebvre, in which private and public spaces are entangled. The role the city plays in shaping the human imagination and innovation has greater implications. Critics like Chidananda Dasgupta have complained about his filmmaking, 'the Calcutta of the burning trams, the communal riots, refugees, unemployment, rising prices and food shortages, yet to me, Calcutta seems to be a constant presence in Ray's cinema' (Dasgupta, 1994, p. 108). This estrangement and isolation of characters are at the core of modern cities, just as T.S. Eliot's Prufrock navigates the city through his inner dilemma and isolation. The city has a greater impact on the lives of the subjects who live in it, just as Aarti cannot be imagined without Calcutta, which flows and feeds into her identity, 'making new' the old and translating lives to fit into the city, like puzzles fitting into their boxes, and making spaces for the new ones. Ray's cinematic oeuvre captures the translational fabric of the city. The city enables the translation of prevalent values and creates a contemplative ground for the battle of spaces, real and imagined, and between stasis and development. While Mumbai, in *Life in a...Metro*, presents everything from a post-liberalization point of view, it brings the values of ambition and hyper-mobility that coexist with a deep sense of personal alienation.

Urban spaces in these films are far removed from being passive. They mediate identities, power structures, gender dynamics, and emotional cartographies. *Life in a...Metro* also makes space for compressed time and emotional rupture, engulfing the contrasting temporalities, which reflect broader socioeconomic paradigms. Yet, both films are united by a common thread- an attempt to humanize the narrative, bring out the complexities, and in doing so contradict the experience of city life. Thus, inferring from the analysis drawn in this paper, it can be stated that spaces are relational, fluid, and are imbued with power. Both narratives cast a light on the shifting meanings of mobility, intimacy, and agency within the modern Indian metropolis. Thus, between the tramline of Calcutta and the traffic jams of Mumbai, urban spaces in Indian cinema offer not just a visual record of spatial dynamics but also a critical lens through which the city's socio-cultural and political textures are ceaselessly re-envisioned.

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