



Interrogating Modernity: Cultural Relativism and the Idea of Civilisation in Satyajit Ray's Agantuk

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Interrogating Modernity: Cultural Relativism and the Idea of Civilisation in Satyajit Ray's *Agantuk*

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Abstract

Satyajit Ray's final cinematic testament, *Agantuk* (The Stranger, 1991), redefines modernity as a moral and intercultural condition rather than a technological or economic one. This paper argues that through the lens of cultural relativism, Ray critiques the Western-dominated conception of civilization and exposes the ethnocentric hierarchies that categorise societies as "advanced" or "primitive." The narrative introduces Manomohan Mitra, the cosmopolitan stranger whose anthropological insights mirror India's postcolonial anxieties and moral dilemmas. By contrasting the bourgeois fear of the urban elite with the ethical integrity of indigenous cultures, Ray challenges Eurocentrism and the developmentalist paradigm that equates progress with industrial and technological growth. The study demonstrates that *Agantuk* offers a decolonized vision of civilization grounded in moral integrity, intercultural empathy, and plural modernities—proposing that true modernity lies in ethical consciousness rather than material achievement.

Keywords: *Satyajit Ray, Agantuk, Cultural Relativism, Modernity, Postcolonialism, Civilisation, Humanism, Anthropology*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Rationale

Satyajit Ray (1921–1992) remains one of the most revered humanists in cinematic history, a filmmaker whose works consistently probed the ethical and social dilemmas of modern India. A prolific intellectual, Ray's films transcended mere storytelling, offering complex meditations on tradition, change, and morality. *Agantuk* (1991), his final work, operates as a profound philosophical culmination of this worldview, condensing decades of observation and critical thought into a tight, chamber drama format.

Released at a juncture when India was poised for radical economic liberalisation and increasing globalisation, the film's critique of modernity takes on particular resonance. Ray uses the unexpected arrival of an estranged uncle, Manomohan Mitra, to trigger a forensic examination of the values held by the urban elite. The narrative's tension hinges not on physical action, but on ideological and ethical debate, positioning the film as a crucial text for understanding postcolonial intellectual thought concerning globalisation and cultural identity (Dutta 115). The premise - the suspicion cast upon an educated, well-travelled stranger by his own middle-class relatives - immediately establishes the central conflict: the tension between the fear-driven rationalism of the modern metropolis and the ethical sincerity of the outsider.

1.2. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following core questions:

1. How does *Agantuk* problematise the Western, technologically-defined idea of "civilization" and expose its inherent ethnocentrism?
2. In what specific narrative and dialogue-based ways does the film engage with the principles of cultural relativism as an anthropological and ethical stance?
3. What nuanced vision of "modernity" one divorced from the developmentalist paradigm - does Ray propose through Manomohan Mitra's character and the film's narrative resolution?

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(Here, the term "developmentalist paradigm" refers to the postcolonial economic belief that national progress must follow the Western model of industrialization and technological expansion, often at the cost of ethical and cultural autonomy.)

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this paper are:

- To interrogate Ray's cinematic discourse on civilisation, showing how it functions as a comprehensive critique of Eurocentric models and advocates for epistemic humility, is the aim.
- To explore the pervasive tension between rational modernity, moral integrity, and indigenous identity within the specific

context of postcolonial India, one must consider various factors.

- To analyse the film's narrative structure and cinematic language as a deliberate tool for dramatising intellectual conflict and achieving a philosophical conclusion.

2. Methodology

The methodology employed is primarily qualitative, utilising textual analysis of the screenplay and close film analysis of *Agantuk*'s mise-en-scène, character dynamics, and dialogue. The theoretical framing integrates two distinct but interconnected fields of inquiry: postcolonial theory (drawing on concepts of Orientalism, hybridity, and provincialising Europe) and anthropological notions of cultural relativism (specifically the Boasian tradition that rejects universal hierarchies of culture). By synthesising these frameworks, the paper positions Ray's film as a unique piece of cultural criticism that bridges aesthetics, ethics, and cultural anthropology.

2.1. Thesis Statement

Agantuk serves as Ray's critical meditation on modern civilisation, arguing that true modernity lies not in technological or economic advancement but in moral and cultural self-awareness. It advocates for a humane universalism grounded in the principles of cultural relativism and plural modernities.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Critical Reception of *Agantuk*

As Satyajit Ray's final film, *Agantuk* has been critically received as a philosophical capstone to his career, often drawing comparisons to his earlier works that dealt with social and moral alienation, such as *Pratidwandi* (The Adversary, 1970) and *Seemabaddha* (Company Limited, 1971). Critics, such as Andrew Robinson, often highlight the film's intense focus on dialogue and moral debate over dramatic action, calling it a "testament" to Ray's unwavering faith in humanism (Robinson 345). The film's minimalist setting - largely confined to a single middle-class Calcutta apartment - amplifies the intensity of the ideological conflict (Sarkar 99).

Manomohan Mitra's character, the *agantuk*, is interpreted not merely as a family member but as a philosophical catalyst, mirroring the function of figures like the guru in *Charulata* (The Lonely Wife, 1964) or the protagonist's alter ego in *Pratidwandi*. However, Manomohan is distinct: he is an educated, self-made man who willingly sheds the trappings of civilised life, choosing a nomadic existence among indigenous tribes. This choice makes him an interrogator, prompting an examination of how Indian society views its own educated global citizens who reject Western norms. Critical writings acknowledge that the suspicion he faces the relentless urge to categorise him as either a fraud or a lunatic is a reflection of the bourgeois society's deep-seated insecurity about wealth, identity, and authenticity (Dasgupta 15).

3.2. Modernity and Postcolonial India

The debate surrounding **modernity** has been central to Indian intellectual thought since the independence movement. Figures like Rabindranath Tagore, while embracing the scientific spirit of the West, vehemently rejected its materialism and cultural arrogance, advocating for a synthesis of Eastern spiritual wisdom and Western rationalism. Mahatma Gandhi offered a more radical critique, seeing industrial modernity as inherently violent and alienating, favouring instead an indigenous, decentralised model

of self-sufficiency. Jawaharlal Nehru, conversely, championed a developmentalist model, viewing modern technology and state-led industrialisation as the necessary path to national progress and global standing (Kaviraj 56).

Ray's cinema, particularly his late period, engages with this tripartite historical debate. *Agantuk* specifically targets the post-Nehruvian bourgeoisie - those who have benefited from developmental modernity but have adopted a consumerist, ethically hollow value system. The film asks: Is the Calcutta apartment, with its television and suspicion, truly more "modern" than the forest village with its honesty and communal wisdom? Ray's exploration aligns with theorists like **Partha Chatterjee**, who distinguish between the political project of the modern state and the cultural project of modernity in postcolonial nations, suggesting that the latter must be negotiated on indigenous terms (Chatterjee 23).

3.3. Cultural Relativism and Civilisation Discourse

Anthropological studies provide the theoretical bedrock for Manomohan's critique. The concept of cultural relativism, foundational to Franz Boas and later developed by Melville Herskovits, posits that a person's beliefs and activities should be understood within the context of their own culture, rejecting any absolute standard of culture or civilisation (Boas 8). This stance directly challenges ethnocentrism the belief that one's own culture is superior - which has historically underpinned colonial and imperial projects.

Ray deploys Manomohan as the embodiment of this anthropological outlook. The uncle's globe-trotting is not tourism but anthropological immersion, enabling him to articulate a systematic critique of Eurocentrism. By recounting his experiences with aboriginal tribes in Australia or the tribes of the Amazon, Manomohan forces his hosts to confront the limitations of their narrow, metropolitan worldview. The narrative, therefore, is structured as a direct attack on the *discourse of civilisation*, the insidious colonial project that categorised non-Western peoples as "primitive" to justify domination and intervention (Said 45).

3.4. Ray's Humanism and Universalism

Ray's cinema, from the innocence of *Pather Panchali* (1955) to the profound questioning of *Agantuk*, has always been marked by a profound **humanism**. This humanism is not merely sentimental but intellectual, concerned with the dignity and moral complexity of the individual. In his early works, Ray negotiated the conflict between tradition and modernisation, often viewing change with compassionate apprehension.

In *Agantuk*, this humanism evolves into a full-fledged **universalism**, yet one that is paradoxically grounded in **cultural diversity**. Manomohan's defence of indigenous cultures is not romantic idealisation; rather, it is a pragmatic recognition that moral and ethical integrity are independent of technological progress. Ray uses the character to suggest that the commonalities of human morality - trust, generosity, community are often more robust in societies that have not yet been corrupted by the consumerist imperatives of global modernity (Ray, *Our Films* 62). His negotiation between the global experience (Manomohan's travels) and the local context (the Calcutta home) ultimately frames civilisation as a matter of ethical choice, not geographical location or technological destiny.

3.5. Theoretical Framework

To fully appreciate *Agantuk* as a philosophical statement, the film must be analysed through the combined lenses of postcolonial theory and cultural anthropology.

3.5.1. Postcolonial Critique of Modernity

The ideological engine of *Agantuk*'s critique is rooted in the tradition of postcolonial thought that seeks to decenter Europe and expose the intellectual violence embedded in the concept of modernity.

Edward Said's Orientalism provides the context for the cultural paranoia displayed by Anila and Sudhindra. Orientalism, the intellectual framework that constructed the "Orient" as a monolithic, exotic, and inferior "Other," functions within the film by inverting the gaze. Anila and Sudhindra, the modern Indians, unconsciously internalise the West's criteria for civilisation (wealth, verifiable identity, professional stability) and apply it to their own "Oriental" outsider (Manomohan). Their suspicion is a form of self-Orientalism, where the "Stranger" is categorised as the untrustworthy, unverified anomaly that threatens their meticulously constructed modern existence (Said 60).

Homi Bhabha's concept of the liminal space and hybridity is helpful in understanding Manomohan's character. Manomohan, an Indian man who rejects the Bengali surname, speaks multiple languages and possesses Western travel documents while championing tribal cultures, exists in the "in-between" space. He is a hybrid figure whose refusal to be defined by a single culture be it Western, Bengali, or tribal makes him an unsettling presence to the securely anchored bourgeois family. His presence destabilises the binary of tradition/modernity, forcing a reassessment of what an authentically *Indian* modernity might look like (Bhabha 37).

Finally, Dipesh Chakrabarty's Provincialising Europe provides the theoretical injunction: the assumption that Europe represents the sole source of modernity and the standard against which all other histories must be judged must be overturned. *Agantuk* is Ray's cinematic act of provincialization. By having Manomohan argue that the aboriginals possess a superior moral framework a more authentic humanism than the Parisians or the Calcuttans, Ray effectively dismantles the universalist claim of Western enlightenment philosophy and insists on the legitimacy of plural modernities (Chakrabarty 12).

3.5.2. Cultural Relativism

At the heart of Manomohan's philosophical identity is the doctrine of cultural relativism. This anthropological concept is not simply a passive tolerance of differences but an active methodological and ethical stance. Franz Boas and Melville Herskovits championed this stance, arguing against the evolutionary notion that all societies progress along a single track from savagery to civilisation. Instead, they argued that culture is an integrated whole, and its practices must be evaluated by its own terms, not an external standard.

Manomohan's dialogues are replete with examples of this relativist thinking. When Sudhindra scoffs at the "primitive" ritual of a tribe, Manomohan counters that the tribe's honesty, their lack of a concept for a bank vault, and their commitment to communal welfare represent a moral advancement that the fraud-ridden, modern world has lost. This shifts the definition of "civilisation" from an achievement of *technology* to an achievement of *ethics*. Ray's employment of cultural relativism here is a sophisticated move: it is used not to praise all non-Western practices blindly, but to highlight the hypocrisy inherent in the supposedly objective

standards of Western progress (Herskovits 78). The critique is thus aimed at the universalising *judgment* of cultures, not the differences themselves.

3.5.3. Ray's Humanist Anthropology

Ray's approach in *Agantuk* can be defined as Humanist Anthropology. This framework views the film as an ethnography of the modern Bengali middle class, conducted by a participant-observer (Manomohan) who is simultaneously an insider and an outsider. Manomohan, the character, embodies Ray's dual role as both a globally informed artist and an intensely local intellectual. His conversations function as ethnographic field notes, contrasting the fear and suspicion of the urban household with the simplicity and trust of the tribal village. The film ultimately uses anthropology as a tool for ethical self-reflection. By showing Manomohan's easy adaptability and cultural fluidity, Ray proposes that the truly "civilised" person is one who can navigate multiple cultural contexts without prejudice, a person whose identity is defined by a universal human ethic, rather than a narrow cultural or national origin. The Humanist Anthropology framework recognises that Ray utilises Manomohan's perspective to bridge aesthetics, ethics, and cultural study, delivering a final, powerful lesson in epistemic humility.

4. Analysis

4.1. The "Outsider" as Cultural Mirror

Manomohan Mitra, the *Agantuk* (stranger), is the dramatic catalyst and the philosophical core of the film. His arrival fundamentally disrupts the carefully calibrated existence of the settled urban couple, Anila and Sudhindra. Manomohan is not simply a long-lost relative; he is an ideological wrecking ball, embodying the very things the Indian bourgeoisie fears and fetishises: the global, unverified identity and the rejection of economic security.

The bourgeoisie's suspicion, particularly that of Sudhindra, is immediately rooted in the modern, rational-bureaucratic demand for verifiable identity. In a society obsessed with documentation, professional titles, and traceable lineage, Manomohan's self-description as an amateur anthropologist, a nomad, a global citizen is insufficient. Sudhindra's immediate consultation with his lawyer friend, Pradip, reveals the moral corruption inherent in their "civilised" world: suspicion is the first resort, and legal scrutiny is the necessary defence against the unknown. This reaction is a powerful indictment of bourgeois modernity, which substitutes trust with contracts and authenticity with documentation.

Manomohan, conversely, uses dialogue as critique. His stories are not anecdotal but carefully constructed philosophical arguments. His recollection of living with a tribal community that had no word for "thief" because they had no concept of ownership forces Sudhindra to question the premise of his own security. "Are we truly civilised," Manomohan implicitly asks, "if our progress requires us to build walls of paranoia, suspicion, and legal protection?" (Ray, *Agantuk* script). This character functions as a cultural mirror, reflecting the urban family's alienation from their own history and their uncritical acceptance of Western materialistic values. Manomohan is comfortable in his identity because he has defined himself against the colonial project of categorisation; his hosts are uneasy because their identity is entirely dependent on the *categories* they have inherited.

4.2. Civilisation vs. Barbarism: The Irony of Modernity

Ray skillfully utilises the irony of modern existence to expose the arbitrary nature of the “civilised” label. The film establishes that in the modern world, technological and economic advancement often coexist with moral decay.

Manomohan recounts an instance of true barbarism not in a remote tribal setting, but in the sophisticated modern West: witnessing the callous treatment of an older woman in an international airport, juxtaposed against his experience of profound hospitality from an impoverished indigenous group. The irony is stark: the airport, the symbol of global connectivity and technological progress, becomes the site of human cruelty, while the remote dwelling, dismissed as “primitive,” is the repository of genuine human kindness.

This narrative strategy directly challenges the Enlightenment concept of linear progress, which assumes that technological innovation naturally leads to moral betterment. Ray argues the opposite: the relentless pursuit of wealth and material security, which are the defining characteristics of capitalist modernity, actively erodes moral empathy. Sudhindra and Anila’s suspicion the fact that their primary motivation for hosting their own relative is the fear of being defrauded is Ray’s ultimate illustration of modern moral bankruptcy. Their fear is their defining feature, making them spiritually “primitive,” despite their professional and material success (Robinson 348). Manomohan summarises this perfectly when he observes that the modern world is one where “the civilised man is a barbarian, only better dressed” (Ray, *Agantuk* dialogue). The film thus performs an intellectual reversal: the “barbarism” lies not in the cultural Other, but in the anxious, fearful, and morally compromised heart of the modern metropolis.

4.3. Cultural Relativism and the Ethics of Understanding

Manomohan’s defence of indigenous cultures is the cinematic realisation of the cultural relativism framework. He engages in what can be termed epistemic humility, insisting that different cultures offer valid and equally complex modes of being, challenging the ethnocentric arrogance of his hosts.

He refutes the notion of evolutionary superiority by focusing on cultural integrity. When he describes the simple lifestyle of the Oraon tribe, he highlights not their lack of technology, but their abundance of *trust* and *community*. He argues that their communal songs, dances, and rituals are not mere entertainment but highly sophisticated systems of maintaining social cohesion and psychic well-being—functions that the alienated urban world attempts to replace, often inadequately, with psychotherapy and consumerism.

Ray employs a subtle but potent defence of indigenous wisdom. In one pivotal scene, Manomohan, realising his hosts are sceptical of his world travels, pulls out a boomerang—an artefact of the Australian Aboriginal people. This object, simultaneously a tool of hunting and a symbol of cultural ingenuity, becomes a point of fascination, especially for the young son, who represents the uncorrupted imagination. Manomohan explains the construction and the necessity of it within its cultural context. The boomerang, a piece of sophisticated indigenous technology, is silently contrasted with the fax machine or the television—technology born of a different cultural necessity. This scene serves as a miniature lesson in intercultural empathy: to understand the object, one must understand the culture that produced it. Manomohan’s anthropological insight is Ray’s implicit call for a world that approaches other cultures with curiosity and respect, not with

a hierarchy of judgment (Dasgupta 18). This relativist position is fundamentally an ethical one, demanding the humility to admit that one’s own cultural perspective is not the universal standard.

4.4. The Domestic Space as Microcosm of Civilisation

The action of *Agantuk* is confined mainly to the Calcutta apartment, which functions as a microcosm of modern, anxious civilisation. The apartment, with its well-furnished interior, its reliance on a telephone and a lawyer, and its inherent atmosphere of guardedness, symbolises the retreat of the modern Indian middle class into a fortress of consumerist morality.

The suspicion levelled against Manomohan by Sudhindra and his friend, the solicitor Pradip, is the moral code of this microcosm. Authenticity is reduced to legal documents; relationships are subordinate to property rights; and human worth is measured by professional stability and bank accounts. The home, which should be a site of unconditional familial acceptance, becomes a court of law.

The key to the film’s philosophical arc lies in the transformation of Anila. Initially, Anila shares her husband’s suspicion, albeit with greater emotional conflict, as the stranger is her uncle. However, she gradually begins to see the hollowness of their life through her uncle’s stories. Her growing willingness to listen, to engage, and ultimately, to defend Manomohan’s humanity against her husband’s rationalising suspicion, represents the film’s hope for reconciliation. Anila’s transformation symbolises the possibility for the modern Indian to reconcile technological progress with ethical self-awareness, allowing tradition (familial and cultural) and modernity (intellectual curiosity and empathy) to coexist without the domination of Western materialism. The domestic space, initially a site of fear, becomes a laboratory for a truly ethical, decolonised modernity.

4.5. Cinematic Language and Symbolism

Ray’s cinematic approach in *Agantuk* is deliberately restrained, using minimalism to amplify the intellectual and moral conflict. The film relies heavily on dialogue and close-ups to foreground the psychological and philosophical struggle, making the conversations the primary sites of dramatic action.

Framing is used effectively to symbolise intellectual positions. Sudhindra is often framed in tight, contained close-ups or rigid two-shots, emphasising his static, defensive, and bounded worldview. Manomohan, conversely, is often captured in more open, fluid mid-shots or framed against a window or an open door, suggesting his expansive, unconfined perspective. The camera often rests on the characters’ faces during long exchanges, forcing the audience to become forensic witnesses to their internal moral debates. The absence of a dramatic score during critical moments of suspicion accentuates the uncomfortable silence and the weight of the characters’ judgments.

The ending sequence is the film’s most explicit visual and symbolic statement on civilisation. Manomohan, having been accepted by Anila and having given his entire inheritance to her family (proving his lack of material motive), dances with the tribal visitors he has brought to the city. This brief, joyous, and utterly authentic moment of communal expression, filmed against the backdrop of the staid Calcutta apartment, shatters the film’s previous tension. The tribal dance, a form dismissed by the modern world as “primitive” becomes the highest expression of human connection and cultural dignity. The dance is the antithesis of the fear and suspicion that governed the home for the film’s duration. The ending, however, is not a simple resolution, but an open

question: Manomohan leaves as suddenly as he arrived, suggesting that the journey toward true civilisation and ethical modernity is a continuous, personal quest that cannot be settled within the confines of a single urban home.

5. Discussion

5.1. Ray's Vision of Ethical Modernity

The analysis confirms that Ray's vision in *Agantuk* moves beyond a simple rejection of the West to propose a model of ethical modernity for postcolonial societies. This vision stands in critical alignment with, yet distinct from, the historical stances of Tagore and Gandhi.

Like Tagore, Ray advocates for a modernity that embraces global intellectual exchange and universal humanism while fiercely guarding against the materialistic corruption of Western consumerism (Tagore 98). Manomohan, who is both highly educated and globally travelled, is the perfect embodiment of Tagore's ideal of the culturally rooted cosmopolitan. However, unlike the often-abstract cultural nationalism of Tagore, Ray grounds his argument in the specific, tangible cultural relativism of Manomohan's anthropological fieldwork.

Ray's vision is arguably more pragmatic than Gandhi's radical anti-modernism. While Gandhi called for the complete dismantling of industrial civilisation, Ray, through his work, implicitly acknowledges the irreversibility of technological progress. Instead of rejecting modernity outright, Ray suggests that it must be *recalibrated*. The true measure of modern success is not the Gross National Product or industrial output, but the Gross National Ethics - the capacity for trust, empathy, and social justice. This is the essence of Ray's ethical modernity: a commitment to moral universality that is only achievable through deep cultural humility and an appreciation for plural ways of living (Kaviraj 68). Manomohan's final act of generosity, giving away the wealth that would have *verified* his status in the modern world, serves as the ultimate moral litmus test.

5.2. The Paradox of Civilisation

Agantuk brilliantly navigates the paradox of civilisation: the state of being that simultaneously represents humanity's greatest potential for progress (intellectual, technological) and its greatest capacity for oppression (colonialism, ethnocentrism, moral decay).

Ray demonstrates that the concept of "civilisation" is an inherently double-edged tool. When it is defined by the West, it becomes a justification for cultural hierarchy and colonial violence (as articulated by Fanon 54). Yet, Manomohan's quest is not to abandon the term, but to reclaim and redefine it. His definition of civilisation hinges on its root meaning: a commitment to the well-being and dignity of the *civis* (citizen/human being).

By contrasting the fear-driven, individualistic urban life with the trust-based, communal life of the indigenous tribes, Ray forces the audience to confront the arbitrary nature of the term. The film suggests that every society contains within itself the seeds of both progress and barbarism, and that the crucial difference lies in the chosen ethical framework. The paradox is resolved by adopting a relativist perspective: recognising that there are plural modernities and plural ways of being civilised, none of which holds absolute superiority. The film acts as a plea to the postcolonial Indian mind to stop viewing its own cultural reality through the judgmental, ethnocentric lens inherited from colonialism (Chakrabarty 15).

5.3. Relevance Today

The philosophical arguments embedded in *Agantuk* retain profound relevance today, particularly in an era characterised by accelerated globalisation, cultural homogenisation, and rising ethno-nationalism.

The film's critique of consumerist materialism and the resulting urban alienation is even sharper in the twenty-first century, where digital technology and global commerce have amplified the anxieties over identity and authenticity first observed by Ray. Manomohan's struggle for verification resonates strongly in a world dominated by KYC (Know Your Customer) protocols, digital tracking, and the monetisation of identity. The modern fear of the "stranger" has been technologically weaponised, making Ray's call for trust and self-verification more urgent than ever.

Furthermore, in a geopolitical climate marked by the resurgence of xenophobia and a defensive retreat into narrow cultural definitions, *Agantuk's* advocacy for cultural relativism and intercultural empathy offers a crucial corrective. Ray's final work reminds contemporary audiences that the path to a harmonious global future lies not in enforcing a single, technologically-driven definition of progress, but in cultivating the moral courage to see the inherent worth and dignity in every cultural form, regardless of its position in the global economic hierarchy. It is a timeless testament to the power of humanism as a decolonising force (Robinson 350).

6. Conclusion

Agantuk stands as a masterwork of cinematic and philosophical reflection, marking the culmination of Satyajit Ray's lifelong engagement with questions of civilization and modernity. This study has shown that the film functions as a profound critique of the Eurocentric narrative of progress, exposing its moral contradictions and advocating instead for a vision of ethical, plural modernities grounded in cultural self-awareness. Through the figure of Manomohan Mitra the cosmopolitan outsider who embodies the spirit of cultural relativism - Ray dismantles the technological and developmentalist definitions of civilization and reclaims modernity as a moral pursuit.

This paper's original contribution lies in positioning *Agantuk* as a cinematic articulation of postcolonial ethical modernity, achieved through the synthesis of postcolonial theory and cultural anthropology. It demonstrates how Ray's film transcends conventional aesthetic readings by offering a philosophical model of decolonized civilization one that privileges empathy, moral integrity, and intercultural understanding over material progress.

The transformation of Anila and the final communal dance encapsulate Ray's utopian ideal: a synthesis of rooted cultural identity and universal humanism. In its intellectual depth and humane vision, *Agantuk* urges viewers to decolonize the mind, to recognize multiple paths to modernity, and to measure civilization not by wealth or technology, but by the ethical capacity for trust and mutual respect.

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