

## #SPIRIT

### The Story of India's Oldest Spirit

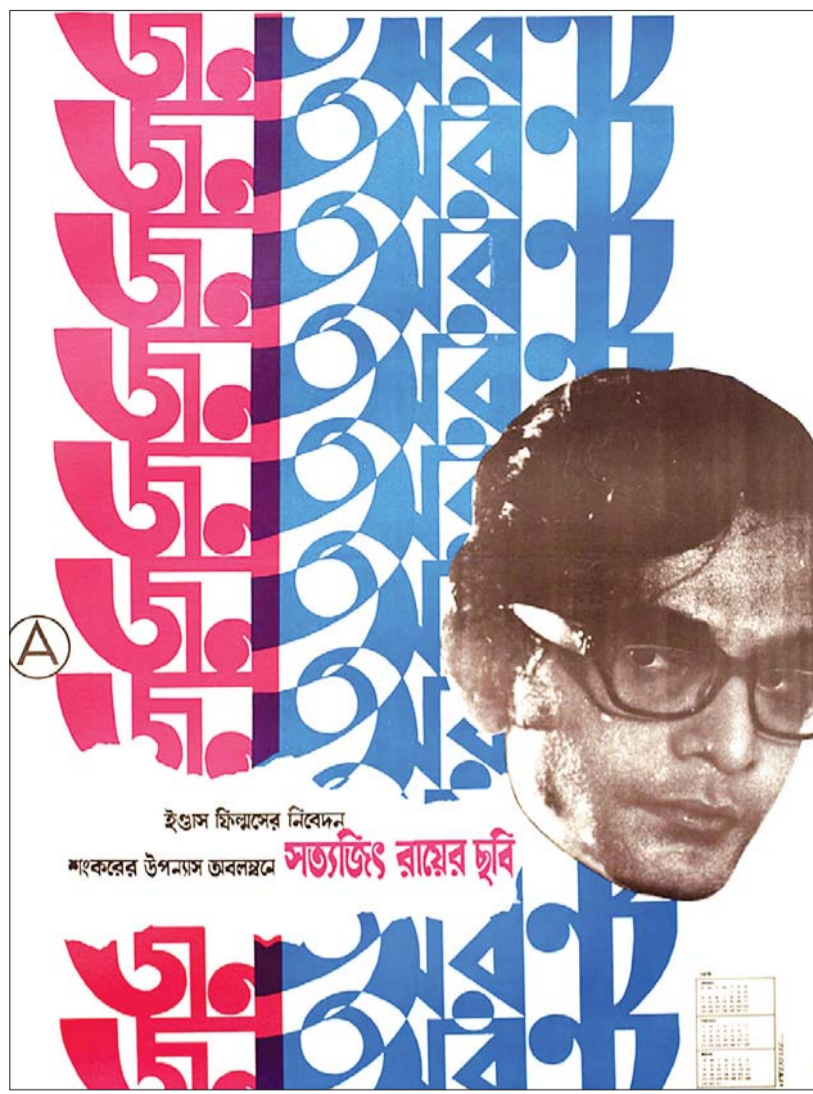
Have you heard of world's only flower spirit, a drink that has existed for millennia and celebrated in the Vedas and woven into India's social culture?



Long before Whiskey made its way to royal tables, Indian glasses held something else, a wild floral spirit, not from grain but from the Mahura flower, a sweet, heady bloom found deep in our forest. It was the six brothers who first commercially distilled it, carrying forward the tradition, not luxury, no fancy labels, no global acclaim, just a flower that could make magic.

But history took a turn. The colonials, eager to push whiskey, gin and rum, quietly banned Mahura and India's original spirit faded into silence. Until now, the same family has brought it back. Six brothers Mahura is double distilled by South Seas Distillery, one of India's oldest malt distillers and the oldest commercial distillers of this flower spirit. Using the same copper pot stills that birthed into India's first single malts, they have reimaged the Six Brothers Mahura with unmatched sophistication. The result? The world's only flower spirit and Indian heritage spirit, sweet, earthy, lightly spiced, smooth as silk with a whisper of the wild. It doesn't come from vineyards or highlands. It comes from Indian soil, Indian folklore, Indian craft and proudly Indian. The world forgot Mahura but six brothers didn't.

You can now experience it as it is taken to its maximum potential by making it available in this luxurious and versatile format for a contemporary experience. So, the next time you pour a drink, skip the imports. Take pride in sipping India's own.



**Dr. Shoma A. Chatterji**  
Film Scholar,  
Journalist & Author

**J**ana Aranya (The Middleman) was released in 1976. It is the last among Satyajit Ray's Calcutta Trilogy composed of Pratiwandi, Seemabaddha and Jana Aranya. The first of the three was adapted from a novel by Sunil Gangopadhyay. The latter two were screen adaptations of another reputed author Mani Sankar Mukhopadhyay (Pen name-Shankar) who passed away recently in Kolkata.

All three films explore the changing scenario of the city of Calcutta (its old nomenclature remained during these films) through the perspective of a young, educated, urban man struggling to establish himself as a confident young man living independent of financial woes. Satyajit, always the most perceptive anatomist of the Bengali psyche, recognised that the tragedy of his time was not poverty alone but the corrosion of belief, of honesty, of integrity and commitment.

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Middleman" is more apt. The film opens with the hero, Somnath (Pradip Mukherjee), taking his B.A. examinations in History. Circumstances, he is not responsible for in any way, robs him of a good result, though he was a very good student and his struggle to get a respectable but ordinary job begins. *Jana Aranya* (The Middleman) is a scathing comment on an erosion of values arising partly out of a decadent education system and partly out of unemployment and associated corrupt practices encroaching into the lives of the urban middle-class in Kolkata.

His constant search for jobs comes to naught each time he finds himself facing a high wall that he finds tough to climb over and across. He is forced to take up any job that does not command him to compromise on his honesty and integrity. But he is not the only victim. The economic environment shows the sameness as happened in Ray's first Calcutta trilogy Pratiwandi, where the hero, Siddhartha, is finally forced to accept the mediocre job of a medical representative away from Calcutta, the city he had no intention of leaving. He gets it, much against his wishes, through the good offices of a local political party friend whose earlier offer for the same job he had rejected.

After knocking on several doors, Somnath finally bags a job which he sadly discovers has a tag attached to it. He is told that he has to get hold of a 'woman' for his boss' contractor to get the contract the contractor will give him. The reason? The con-



Siddhartha and Sutapa.

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## FIFTY YEARS OF JANA ARANYA (THE MIDDLEMAN)

### #SATYAJIT RAY



Mrs. Ganguly, Somnath and Mr. Mitter.

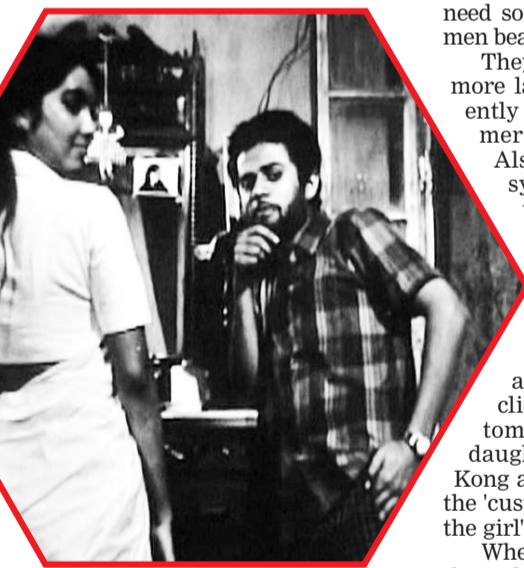
tractor, Mr. Agarwal, is married to a rich man's polio-stricken daughter. Ray's command over minimalism does everything by suggestion as this wife is never shown and nor is Mr. Agarwal shown as a bad man. This is one more pointer to the financial circumstances of the city of Calcutta has submerged into, unemployment among the educated urban middle class being the biggest yet invisible villain in the entire scenario.

Somnath later discovers that a close friend of his, a graduate, is forced to drive a taxi to make both ends meet. Somnath's father, whose older son is very brilliant and successful in a corporate job, helplessly watches his younger son's frustrations for not able to get a good job.

As the hero Somnath, along with his friend, a brilliant performance by Robi Ghosh, goes from door to door in search of a woman for the reward of a prized contract, Ray with his subtle sense of sharp-edged black humour, cracks the facade of the bhadralok Bengali society in Calcutta to expose the incredibly dirty goings-on in girl-running. A tutorial class doubles up as a rendezvous for call-girls, the watchman, a devout Hindu, functions as a procurer in the evenings. A mother of two young girls has pushed them into sex work, a husband who drinks and lives off his wife's earnings, is actually a pimp pretending to be "respectable" and "honest."

Ray offers a critique on the system of disguised prostitution in Calcutta. The first house Somnath and his friend visit to arrange for a

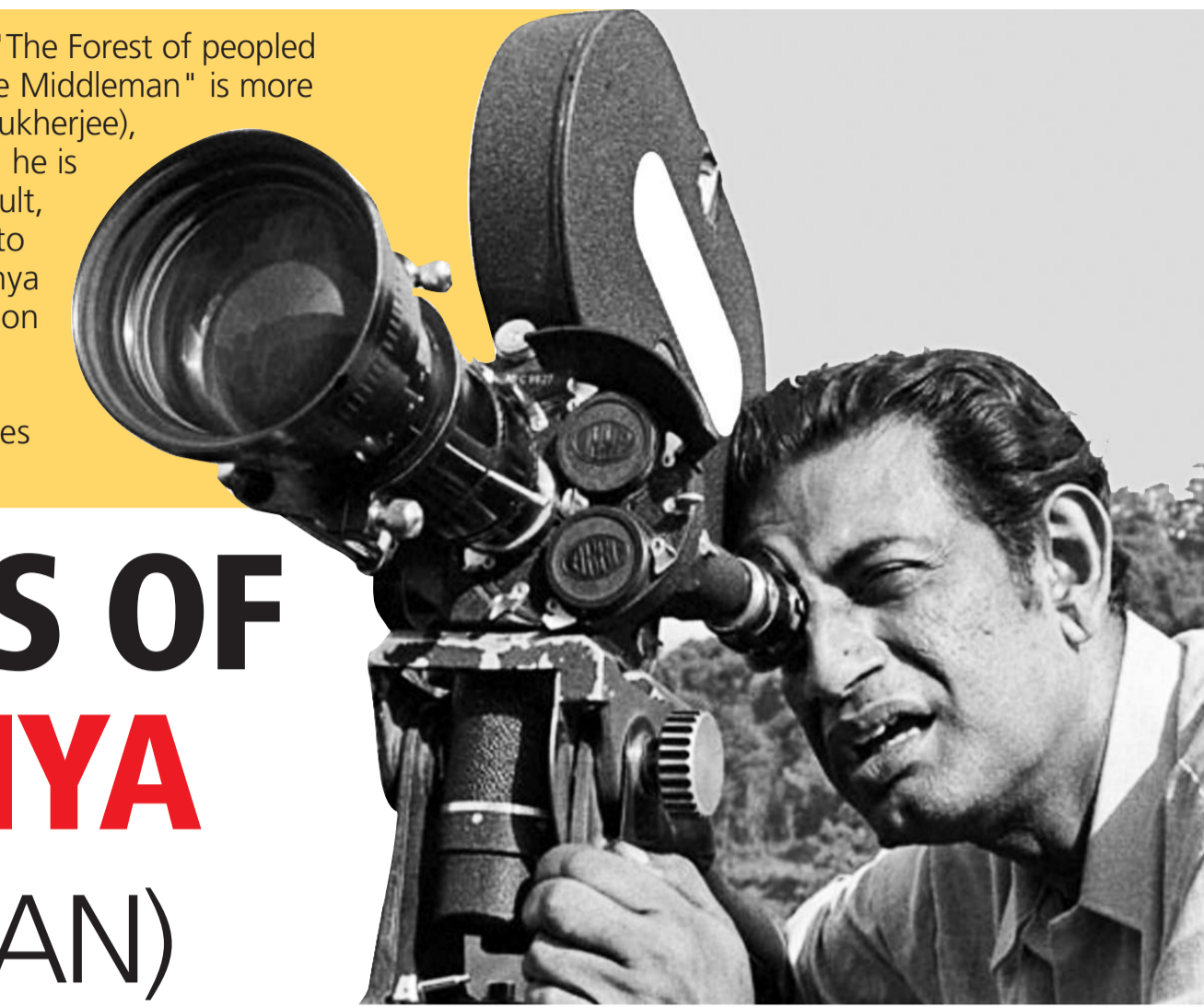
'girl' to service the former's client is Mrs. Ganguly. It is a typical middle-class home where we are introduced to this very attractive woman. The home reflects the middle-class status with a small piano in the sitting



"The Adversary" - Satyajit Ray (1970).

room and Sukumar referring to how helpful her new telephone connection has been for her business and for those who seek her services. There is a power cut and we find a candle lighting the room and Sukumar reclining on the sofa, airs himself with a hand-fan. But as she is reading herself, her husband, reportedly a clerk in the municipality, enters, completely drunk and stops her from stepping out for "business."

He drinks off her earnings and doubles up as her pimp and decides



### Creating Something New

U pycling is a growing trend that's still under the radar for some. Simply, it's all about taking old objects and furniture, and adding your own creativity and craft to make it something new, unique and beautiful. National Uppycling Day is all about celebrating this amazing art of making something old into something new again! However, with that art also comes the focus on sustainable use of household goods, recycling items instead of being wasteful, and the many different ways we can reuse things that we might think are completely useless at first glance.

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They next visit another home, more lavishly decorated, in apparently a better locality than the former one. The lady has an Alsatian which was a status symbol during the time setting of the film. She has two daughters and she has pushed both into prostitution. She seems to have redecorated the well-appointed apartment with "two rooms, each, with an attached bath" for visiting clients. She laments that a customer has taken one of her daughters to Singapore/Hong Kong and the girl jumped at it but the 'customer' is now earning out of the girl's services there.

When Sukumar informs her that the other daughter, who is busy servicing a client in her room, needs to go with them to a posh hotel, she vehemently refuses to let the girl step out to visit a client.

The third place they visit is a seedy looking coaching class where the watchman is reading out from the Ramayana. Kawna, now named Juthika, is the sister of Somnath's friend. She symbolises a world of crumbling morals among the lower middle class on the one hand and the upper class on the other in different ways. She operates as a "call girl" through telephonic appointments done by the watchman of a coaching class. She is a freelancer

and visits her clients instead of it being the other way round.

The classrooms of the coaching class are used as a waiting room for girls waiting for a call. The watchman tells Sukumar that Juthika, the girl he has fixed for him, is only three months into the business but her rates have jumped from Rs. 50 to Rs. 250 within that short time. But she is "invisible" and belongs clearly to the mainstream, comes of lower middle class Bengali stock with her brother, a graduate, and once a close friend of Somnath is reduced to driving a taxi.

Kawna accepts her vocation in a no-nonsense, matter-of-fact way, refusing to recognise the hero. She denies that she is Kawna, Somnath's friend's sister, and tells him repeatedly that her name is Juthika. She does not stoop to narrate a sob story to evoke his sympathy. She insists that he should not turn the taxi back to where they came from because she says that it will be a loss for both of them. Kawna's prostitution in this film is a bribe in human form for a big contract to be gained by Somnath, the hero, while the 'taker' of the bribe is personified in the diabetic Mr. Gopeika who married the polio-afflicted daughter of a rich businessman, shows another side of the ugly face of corruption. The film sometimes subtly, sometimes not quite so subtly, depicts a masquerading social and moral universe. When Somnath hands her the payment, she points out that he is overpaying her but he insists, so she pockets it quietly. *Jana Aranya* spells out that over time, the sex

workshop works as much in the mainstream as she does in her professional ghetto of Sonagachhi and Harkata Goli. For people living within the mainstream, it is difficult to identify a sex worker on the basis of where she lives. The whole city, in other words, is a "red light area" and is no longer constrained within the limits of a marked ghetto.

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