



# Child Psychology In The Stories Of Satyajit Ray: A Descriptive Study

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

This paper offers a descriptive and analytical study of child psychology in the short stories of Satyajit Ray, focusing specifically on *Sadanander Khude Jagat* and *Shibu Ar Rakshaser Katha*. Although Ray is widely known as a writer for children, his stories operate on dual levels: they entertain young readers on the surface while simultaneously presenting profound psychological insights for adult readers. The study examines how Ray sensitively portrays the inner worlds of children and reveals the fragile nature of the developing mind when shaped by neglect, fear, and adverse social environments.

Through close textual analysis, the paper explores how Sadananda's psychological withdrawal is caused by persistent disregard from adults, leading him to construct an imaginary world as a refuge from emotional pain. This retreat into fantasy, while initially protective, ultimately hinders his natural psychological growth and deepens his alienation from reality. Similarly, in *Shibu Ar Rakshaser Katha*, the study highlights how externally imposed, irrational fear gradually destabilises a child's mental state. Shibu's fear of his teacher, rooted in suggestion and imagination rather than reality, demonstrates how a child's mind can be manipulated and distorted in the absence of proper guidance and reassurance.

The paper also underscores Ray's balanced recognition of both heredity and environment in shaping child psychology. More importantly, it argues that the lack of emotional support and trustworthy communication with adults plays a decisive role in pushing children towards psychological abnormality. The study ultimately stresses the responsibility of parents and guardians in ensuring healthy mental development by offering empathy, attention, and age-appropriate emotional support.

**Keywords:** Child Psychology; Satyajit Ray; Imagination and Fear; Environmental Influence; Alienation; Bengali Short Stories, etc.

## Introduction

One of the major thematic concerns of Satyajit Ray's short stories is psychology. In several of his stories, he vividly portrays various psychological abnormalities and complexities of the child's mind. It is well known that Satyajit Ray wrote primarily for children. Yet it is striking that he presents such complex psychological issues of childhood in such a simple and lucid manner that young readers experience no difficulty in enjoying the pleasure of the stories. This is because Ray's stories operate on two levels of meaning. The literal level of the narrative is always made accessible and enjoyable for children, while at the deeper, implicit level, adult readers find rich material for serious reflection.

Satyajit Ray has written many stories dealing with child psychology. However, keeping in mind the limited scope of the present research article, this study attempts to explore the psychological depth of two of his stories, *Sadanander Khude Jagat* and *Shibu Ar Rakshaser Katha*.

## Significance of the Study

The present study is significant as it brings into focus scholarly attention the psychological dimension of children in the short stories of Satyajit Ray, an aspect that is often overshadowed by discussions of his popularity as a writer for young readers. By closely analysing *Sadanander Khude Jagat* and *Shibu Ar Rakshaser Katha*, this research highlights how Ray moves beyond simple storytelling to present a nuanced

exploration of the child's inner world, thereby enriching Bengali children's literature with deep psychological insight.

One of the major contributions of this study lies in its demonstration of how environmental neglect, emotional indifference, and fear imposed from outside can disrupt the natural psychological development of children. Through the characters of Sadananda and Shibu, the research shows that abnormal mental states do not arise innately but are largely shaped by adverse surroundings. This understanding is particularly significant for literary studies, as it positions Ray's stories within the broader framework of psychological realism and social critique rather than viewing them merely as imaginative or entertaining narratives.

The study is also important from an interdisciplinary perspective, as it bridges literature and psychology. It illustrates how literary texts can function as valuable resources for understanding child psychology, especially in cultural contexts where formal psychological discourse may be limited. Ray's stories, as analysed in this paper, reveal how imagination, fear, withdrawal, and aggression operate as coping mechanisms in children who lack emotional security and validation from adults.

Furthermore, the research contributes to Ray studies by reaffirming his modern outlook on childhood. It highlights his balanced approach in acknowledging both heredity and environment in shaping the human mind, while clearly emphasising the dominant role of social and familial surroundings. This positions Ray as a sensitive observer of childhood rather than merely a storyteller for entertainment.

Finally, the study holds practical relevance for parents, educators, and guardians. By revealing the psychological consequences of neglect, ridicule, and misinformation, it underscores the necessity of empathetic communication with children. The findings advocate for providing children with adequate emotional support and attentive guidance to ensure healthy mental development. Thus, the study is significant not only as a literary analysis but also as a socially relevant inquiry into the psychology of childhood as reflected in Satyajit Ray's fiction.

### Discussion

In Satyajit Ray's story *Sadananda Khude Jagat*, the mental state of a thirteen-year-old boy is portrayed. It is commonly accepted that the human mind is shaped by both heredity and the surrounding environment. However, realists tend to downplay the role of heredity and emphasise environmental influence as the primary factor in psychological development. Although Satyajit Ray was himself a realist, he attached importance to both heredity and environment in the formation of the human mind. This perspective is reflected in many of his stories.

For instance, in *Rontur Dadu*, Ray acknowledges the role of heredity by showing that Rontu's ability to sing well is inherited from his grandfather, who was a singer. Similarly, in *Pintur Dadu*, we observe a physical resemblance between young Pintu and his grandfather in their respective adolescence. In *Sadananda Khude Jagat* as well, Ray informs the readers that one of Sadananda's grandfathers was mentally unstable. This information is deliberately provided to suggest that heredity plays a role in Sadananda's abnormal mental behaviour. Notably, Ray recognises the combined influence of heredity and environment in shaping the human psyche.

Every individual becomes self-aware from early childhood. At every moment, a person attempts to assert their identity before others and seeks recognition of their existence through the actions and responses of those around them. This is a natural human tendency. In *Sadananda Khude Jagat*, we see that Sadananda is deeply unhappy because, being young, the adults in the household do not take him seriously. When he speaks to them about the things that give him joy, they dismiss his words with laughter and refuse to attach any importance to his interests. Their disregard for what he values wounds his sense of self. As a result, the natural psychological development of Sadananda is hindered.

Unable to express himself to the adults, Sadananda fails to receive validation of his existence from them. His emotions, feelings, and pleasures appear meaningless in their eyes. This persistent neglect gives rise to a sense of resentment towards adults within him. Sadananda states that whenever he tried to share his sources of happiness with the elders, "they paid no attention at all. What made me angriest was when they laughed at what I said."<sup>1</sup>

The adults' behaviour causes such deep psychological pain that Sadananda wishes to sever all emotional ties with them. His sense of hurt is so intense that he refuses even to address them by name or familial relation, referring to them instead simply as "they". Gradually, he resolves: "One day I decided that from then on, I would tell no one anything. Whatever I did, I would do it myself, and whatever I learned, I would learn on my own."<sup>2</sup> Consequently, Sadananda begins to withdraw from the external world around him. Having received nothing but neglect from his surroundings, he comes to feel that a world which refuses to acknowledge his existence has no place or necessity in his life.

As a result, withdrawing from the real world, he constructs a private world within his own mind. In this personal world, he is free; there is no one there to ignore or belittle him. This private world represents the true nature of Sadananda's contracted and withdrawn personality. Continuous neglect at the hands of the adults around him deeply wounds his mind, causing it gradually to shrink away from the adult world. Consequently, the natural development of his individuality is obstructed.

The loss of his sense of self in the real world is compensated for by severing emotional ties with the adult world. He creates for himself a world of joy within his own mind. Sadananda explains that the things that give him pleasure often go unnoticed by most people. He says:

“Even while lying on my bed, I see so many delightful things. Sometimes silk-cotton seeds drift into the room through the window. They have long, soft fibres and float about in the air. It’s great fun. At times, one may come down near your face, and the moment you blow at it, it whooshes away towards the beam.”<sup>3</sup>

Sadananda further describes his private world by saying:

“Suppose you are absent-mindedly pushing a stick into the ground, and suddenly you see a dragonfly flying about aimlessly and then perching on the tip of the stick—how wonderfully amusing that is!”<sup>4</sup>

Sadananda becomes so deeply self-absorbed in his private world that even when a crow perches on the top of his window, he remains completely still, almost rigid, watching the bird’s movements out of the corner of his eye. Every action of the crow appears to him like an act in a circus, and observing it gives him immense pleasure. However, Sadananda reveals that what amuses him most of all are ants. He forms friendships with them, and it is around these ants that his personal world of joy is primarily built.

The story reveals that although Sadananda appears cheerful and content within his private world, he is melancholic, despondent, and introverted. The neglect of the adults fractures his sense of existence into two parts. While he is happy in the imagined world of his own creation, he feels intensely uncomfortable. He is incapable of expressing himself in the external world. The joy and happiness of his inner world fail to provide him with the strength or courage to confront reality, because he has consciously distanced himself from it.

Sadananda created his imaginary world as an escape from the pain of the real world. Yet, in seeking happiness and pleasure within this realm of imagination, he becomes even more sorrowful in the world of reality.

Satyajit Ray has vividly portrayed several images in the story to show how Sadananda has gradually withdrawn himself from the real world. One incident from Sadananda’s school life may be cited here. Sadananda and Sheetal always sat side by side on the same bench in class; it had almost become a fixed routine for them. One day, Sadananda arrived late to class, and as a result, a boy named Phani had taken his place beside Sheetal. Had it been any other boy, Sadananda would probably have asked him to vacate the seat and reclaimed his own. Such behaviour is quite common in schools. However, Sadananda did nothing of the sort. He could not openly say anything to Phani. Instead, he merely thought to himself, “What else could I do? There was a space at the back, near the wall, and I sat there.”<sup>5</sup>

This incident clearly shows Sadananda’s inability to assert his personality. The negative environment surrounding him is largely responsible for this condition.

Having faced continuous neglect from the outside world, Sadananda had grown somewhat gloomy and withdrawn. As a result, his friends teased him, saying, “Isn’t your name Sadananda? Then why do you look like such a gloomy ghost?”<sup>6</sup>

When his friends mocked him in this manner and followed him around, he remained silent. This does not mean that he lacked an answer. In his mind, he replied, “I didn’t give myself my name; my grandmother gave it to me. Of course, had she known beforehand that the name would cause me so much trouble, she would surely have chosen another.”<sup>7</sup>

Here we see that Sadananda does have suitable responses, yet he is unable to express himself in the external world. This is a direct consequence of his withdrawal from reality. It is worth noting, however, that Sadananda had deep affection for his grandmother. Therefore, he does not blame her for his name; instead, he holds those people responsible who wound a person’s self-respect. Just as he loved his grandmother, he once loved the elders of the household as well, but because they neglected him, he gradually distanced himself from them.

At present, the companions of Sadananda’s private world are ants. He spends time talking to them, constantly remains attentive to their needs and difficulties, and even feeds them. Sadananda has confined himself so deeply within his imaginary world that he finds it difficult to return to reality. He has made himself a willing captive of his world of imagination. In the story, we see that Sadananda is afraid of his classmate Chiku. One day, while Sadananda was spending his solitary time under a tree with the ants, Chiku arrived and began to harass him. Soon after, Chiku kicked and destroyed the ants’ nest, killing many of them. This incident brings about a significant transformation in Sadananda. The boy whom he once feared now becomes the target of his rage, and Sadananda strikes Chiku, cracking his head open.

This episode reveals that the private world Sadananda had created by isolating himself from reality was his sole psychological refuge. It was the only place where he could assert his existence, as no one there ignored or belittled him. All the joy of his life related to these ants. Therefore, when Chiku attacked this personal world, Sadananda became violent to protect his own existence. He declares, “Not only Chiku, but anyone who destroys the ants’ home will have their head split open.”<sup>8</sup>

Sadananda’s parents beat him for injuring Chiku and confined him indoors. Yet this physical punishment causes him no pain; what truly distresses him is the suffering of the ants.

Another significant story by Satyajit Ray dealing with child psychology is *Shibu Âr Rakshaser Katha (Shibu and the Tale of the Ogre)*. At a superficial level, it appears to be an amusing story centred on the bizarre imagination of a schoolboy. However, closer examination reveals a serious psychological concern underlying this humorous surface. Fear is a natural human emotion, but the story does not deal with ordinary fear. Instead, the writer explores the condition of a child's mind shaped by irrational and unfounded fear. The narrative illustrates how a fabricated fear, implanted from outside, can deeply affect a child's psyche, even leading to mental disturbance.

The boy at the centre of the story is named Shibu, a school-going child. Shibu's neighbour Phatik suffers from a mental illness caused by excessive study. Although the people of the neighbourhood do not regard Phatik very highly, Shibu places great trust in him. As a result, Phatik's distorted imagination gradually infects Shibu's mind.

One day, as Shibu was on his way to school, Phatik called out to him and said, "If you don't listen to what I am about to tell you, you will come to harm."<sup>9</sup> Shibu was compelled to listen to Phatik. The narrator explains why Shibu, despite his reluctance, felt forced to hear him out: "Shibu had heard that madmen sometimes speak truths that ordinary people are incapable of expressing. Thinking of the possible danger, he advanced towards Phatik in fear."<sup>10</sup>

What is noteworthy here is that a sense of fear had already taken root in Shibu's mind, and this fear had been introduced from outside. Phatik's words now served to further intensify that fear.

Phatik asked Shibu whether he had ever noticed the teeth of their mathematics teacher, Janardan Babu. Faced with this strange question, Shibu could only reply in the negative, because Janardan Babu was a grave man who rarely smiled, and therefore Shibu had never seen his teeth. Phatik then told him to observe Janardan Babu's teeth on the day he smiled and report back what he saw. Coincidentally, that very day, an amusing incident in class made Janardan Babu laugh, and Shibu's eyes immediately shifted to his teeth. On his way home from school, Shibu informed Phatik that he had seen Janardan Babu's teeth and that everything seemed normal, except that the teeth on either side were somewhat large. Phatik appeared to anticipate this response and, with an air of authority, remarked that such teeth were called "canines" or "dog teeth."<sup>11</sup>

Phatik went on to explain that not only dogs, but all carnivorous animals possess large canines, which they use to tear raw flesh and chew bones. From the moment Shibu heard this, doubts began to arise in his mind about Janardan Babu. He started to wonder whether his mathematics teacher might have some connection with a demon. He thought to himself, "Janardan Babu's back isn't quite straight. It looks hunched, almost like a crooked scoop."<sup>12</sup>

Although Shibu knew perfectly well that Janardan Babu suffered from rheumatism and therefore could not walk with a straight back, a sharp conflict between imagination and reality began to take shape in his mind. Satyajit Ray illustrates here how children construct strange worlds of imagination, often inspired by fairy tales. Up to a certain age, this imaginative world remains active in a child's mind. Shibu is at precisely such an age, when imagination exerts a strong influence over his thoughts, and he has not yet reached the stage of becoming a realist like adults. Day and night, Shibu searches in his imagination for similarities between Janardan Babu's appearance and actions and those of a demon. He even convinces himself that "the white of Janardan Babu's eyes isn't white at all—it's red, bright red."<sup>13</sup>

At this point, Shibu has no doubt left in his mind: Phatik was right, and Janardan Babu must indeed be a demon.

Confined within his imaginary world, Shibu becomes completely detached from reality in his perception of Janardan Babu. He refuses to understand that many people naturally have two slightly larger teeth on either side of their dental arrangement, and that this does not prove a person to be a demon. Despite knowing that Janardan Babu's hunched posture is caused by rheumatism, Shibu refuses to accept it, believing instead that it is a sign of a demon's "scoop-like back." He also fails to acknowledge the simple fact that anyone's eyes may temporarily appear red for various reasons. As a result, Shibu gradually becomes mentally disturbed, which obstructs his normal psychological development.

Earlier, on his way home from school, Shibu used to wander around a nearby garden, throw pebbles into the pond to watch frogs leap, play for a while on a brick platform, and then return home. Now, however, after becoming convinced of Janardan Babu's demonic nature, Shibu no longer enjoys walking through the garden on his way home. The place now seems eerily silent and frightening to him. This atmosphere is merely a reflection of his fear-ridden mind, projecting its anxiety onto the surroundings—something he had never experienced before. Now, in his troubled state, he feels that "evening seems to be closing in a little earlier today."<sup>14</sup>

Crows cry out every evening as a matter of routine, yet Shibu imagines that they are crying unusually loudly today, as if they are frightened for some reason. In truth, it is Shibu himself who is afraid, afraid of the demon Janardan. From this fearful state of mind, he begins to detect signs of terror in everything around him. For the same reason, he no longer takes pleasure in splashing the pond water to make the frogs jump. In this way, Shibu's suspicion continues to grow day by day.

The suspicion that entered Shibu's mind from outside is eventually resolved from outside as well. Phatik provides him with a means to overcome his terror, and by following Phatik's instructions, Shibu is finally freed from his fear.

### Findings and Discussion

The present study reveals that child psychology constitutes a central and consciously crafted theme in Satyajit Ray's short stories, rather than a peripheral narrative element. Through *Sadanander Khude Jagat* and *Shibu Ar Rakshaser Katha*, Ray offers a sensitive and realistic portrayal of the inner conflicts, fears, and emotional vulnerabilities of children. The findings clearly indicate that Ray's depiction of childhood is grounded in psychological realism and a deep understanding of the developmental stages of the child's mind.

One of the most important findings of the study is that environmental influence plays a decisive role in shaping abnormal psychological behaviour in children. In *Sadanander Khude Jagat*, Sadananda's gradual withdrawal from reality is not the result of innate mental illness alone but is primarily caused by sustained neglect, ridicule, and emotional indifference from adults. His inability to express himself or gain recognition leads him to create an imaginary world as a psychological refuge. This private world, though initially comforting, eventually restricts his emotional growth and intensifies his alienation from the real world. The study thus establishes that emotional neglect can fracture a child's sense of self and push them towards introversion and aggression.

The analysis also finds that Ray maintains a balanced view of heredity and environment. While he acknowledges hereditary influence, such as the mention of Sadananda's mentally unstable grandfather, he does not present heredity as a deterministic factor. Instead, environmental conditions and adult behaviour emerge as the dominant forces shaping the child's psyche. This nuanced perspective reflects Ray's modern psychological outlook and distinguishes his work from simplistic cause-and-effect narratives.

In *Shibu Ar Rakshaser Katha*, the findings show how irrational fear implanted from outside can severely distort a child's perception of reality. Shibu's fear of his teacher does not arise naturally but is induced by Phatik's distorted imagination and authoritative suggestions. The study demonstrates how, at a particular developmental stage, a child's mind remains highly susceptible to fantasy, folklore, and suggestion. In the absence of rational guidance and reassurance from adults, imagination overrides logic, leading to anxiety, paranoia, and psychological imbalance. Shibu's gradual mental disturbance highlights the fragile boundary between imagination and reality in childhood.

The discussion further reveals that both Sadananda and Shibu lack a trustworthy adult figure with whom they can share their fears and emotions. This absence of emotional support compels them to retreat into private imaginative spaces, which ultimately become psychologically harmful. Ray thus critiques not only individual behaviour but also the broader social failure to listen to and understand children.

Overall, the findings confirm that Satyajit Ray's stories function as literary case studies of child psychology, exposing how neglect, fear, and emotional isolation can disrupt healthy mental development. The discussion underscores Ray's commitment to portraying childhood with empathy and psychological depth, making his stories relevant not only as literary texts but also as reflections on social responsibility towards children.

### Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it may be concluded that both Sadananda and Shibu drift from normal psychological states towards abnormality solely due to the influence of their surroundings. Had Sadananda not been neglected by the adults around him, his mind would have developed naturally within the real world. Similarly, in Shibu's case, had Phatik not implanted such imaginary fears in his mind, Shibu would not have indulged in baseless fantasies about Janardan Babu. In essence, neither of these children could express their inner thoughts to any trustworthy adult in the real world. Consequently, as the stories reveal, they retreat into their private worlds of imagination and gradually develop psychological disturbances.

Therefore, for the healthy psychological development of children, it is the duty of every guardian to devote adequate time to them and to address their mental concerns in a manner appropriate to their age and emotional capacity.

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