

**SEEMABADDHA (COMPANY LIMITED)** is a 1971 Indian drama directed by Satyajit Ray. It's the second portion of his Calcutta Trilogy, following *Pratidwandi (The Adversary)* and preceding *Jana Aranya (The Middle Man)*. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

19 of a possible 20 points = a major classic

India 1971 color 112 minutes subtitled live action feature drama  
Producer: Chitranjali of Nepal = Bharat Shamser Jung Bahadur Rana

Key: \* indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

Points:

- 2 Direction: Satyajit Ray\*
  - 2 Editing: Dulal Dutta
  - 2 Cinematography: Soumendu Roy\*
  - 1 Lighting
  - 2 Screenplay: Satyajit Ray\* from the novel of the same name by  
Moni Sankar Mukherjee
  - 2 Music: Satyajit Ray\*
  - 2 Art Direction: Asok Bose
  - 2 Sound: J. D. Irani and Durgadas Mitra
  - 2 Acting
  - 2 Creativity
- 19 total points

Cast: Barun Chanda\* (Syamalendu Chatterjee), Sharmila Tagore\* (Sudarsana a.k.a. Tutul), Parumita Chowdhury (Syamal's wife, Dolan), Harindranath Chatterjee\* (Sir Baren Roy), Haradhan Banerjee\* (Talukdar, Peters' personnel director at its factory), Indira Roy (Syamal's mother), Promod Ganguly (Syamal's father), Miss Shefali (Cabaret Dancer), Haradhan Bandopadhyay (Nilambar), others

*Seemabaddha (Company Limited)* was set in early 1970s Calcutta, a city racked by revolutionary violence and massive youth unemployment. The drama begins with a lengthy narration by Syamalendu, who serves as film protagonist. It recounts autobiographically his progress from studious, highly intelligent schoolboy to ambitious business executive working for the Hindustani branch of a multinational fan and lamp manufacturing company called Peters. He's become the export sales manager of the fan division and hopes to be promoted imminently to a seat on the board of directors.

While awaiting this advancement, Syamelendu is visited by his young sister-in-law, nicknamed Tutul. She has idolized him from the time he was one of her father's students and a suitor for her sister's hand. Showing off the affluent wonders of the city to this visitor from Patna, the cosmopolitan guide accompanies her to racetrack, nightclub, and a swanky resort formerly only open to British aristocrats. Nor does the host miss any opportunity to display each luxury in an eighth-floor apartment suite the Peters company has provided him and his wife.

The only child of this business-focused couple is safely squirreled away at a private school in Darjeeling. He communicates a stoic resignation to that condition through letters to his parents. The boy is receiving a thorough British education. Presumably one that will eventually advance him through ranks of similarly trained employment seekers to a lofty executive position resembling that of his dad's. Father wishes greater propinquity for him. But spendthrift Mother believes that would only prove distracting to the family's breadwinner. So their child remains indefinitely stuck in distant foothills, already starting to show a streak of arrogant competitiveness around peers.

Ray operates adventurously here, alternating point-of-view between Syamelendu and Tutul. The latter emerges as the conscience of her idol, watching self-serving behavior without overt criticism while defending her own privacy. Though the Chatterjees attempt to dangle a society friend as prospective fiancé, Tutul is merely repulsed by him. Nor is she favorably impressed by a lecherous senior Anglo-Indian board director of Peters who ogles both her and a company secretary during the course of the drama. The audience observes Calcutta through her eyes, seeing acute contrast between crowded, noisy street life and quiet spaciousness of sparsely furnished offices, boardrooms, and luxury suites.

When not engrossed in work, Syamelendu busies himself with nightcaps, cabaret trips, and gambling on horse races, even suggesting to Tutul that she consider enriching herself by taking a job as exotic dancer in a nightclub. He claims she earns more than he does, which could well be true. However, the virginal onlooker refuses both dance and alcohol offerings, succumbing only to the lure of gambling, much as director Ray himself found one-armed bandits irresistible. When the young woman, emerged from an afternoon at the races with actual winnings, Syamelendu shrugs them off as simply “beginner’s luck.”

The idyllic world of Mr. Chatterjee suddenly falls apart when he receives word a shipment of fans soon bound for Iraq contains painting discolorations and will be rejected by receivers. Unless the problem is rectified in approximately one week, Peters will have to cancel the order and pay a penalty to the requisitioning firm in Iraq. Informing Mr. Pheris – a managing director who is his immediate superior – of the problem, Syamelendu becomes painfully it is solely his own responsibility. When a company rival managing the lamps division who aspires to the same director position hears of this dilemma, he and his wife begin celebrating what appears a now-assured promotion. Meeting his harried rival at a cabaret, the competitor can’t resist commenting obliquely about the latter’s setback. Syamelendu hurriedly assures the two women accompanying him, his wife and sister-in-law, that the business difficulty is a minor one.

He confesses to Tutul the true state of affairs when she finds him alone with a bottle of liquor in his apartment. Like Mr. Pheris, she offers no solution, merely sympathy, a derogatory remark about unnecessary drinking and the suggestion he might try generating some kind of labor discontent or slowdown at the factory.

In desperation, Syamelendu phones the personnel director of the plant producing disfigured fans. Talukdar soon arrives in person to discuss ways and means to postpone their delivery without incurring a punishing fine. Their solution: a factory lockout due to worker sabotage. Details can be left safely to Talukdar, who has previous experience plotting such escapades.

Conflict between workers and supervisors eventually leads to calls for a strike. These are followed by a bombing which severely injures and hospitalizes a night watchman at the factory.

Oops! That's more than Syamelendu bargained for when he talked with Talukdar. The result is imposition of a lockout and indefinite suspension of factory production. Is the company to blame for this? It appears the answer is no.

Of course, Syamelendu and Talukdar know better. As does Tutul, who connects the dots quite successfully. She must decide for herself whether this postponement is good or bad and how it will affect her relationship with an ethically challenged brother-in-law.

The film's crushing final scene is wordless, reminiscent of the conclusion to Antonioni's *L'avventura* (*The Adventure*), though not quite as downbeat.

Acting is superb throughout, with standouts being Barun Chanda in his film debut as smugly urbane, seemingly unflappable Syamelendu, Sharmila Tagore in the winsome role of calculatingly deflating Tutul, Harindrinath Chatterjee as ever-flirtatious, Anglicized Sir Baren Roy, and Haradhan Banerjee as smarmy, conspiratorial Talukdar.

Ray's direction and Soumendu Roy's cinematography make the most of arched eyebrows, turned backs, cigarette smoke rings, and a lengthy sequence of legs climbing eight flights of steps. Less impressive as always are traveling shots obviously using screens. To show company executive hierarchy at Peters, Ray opts for a series of oval inserts in the manner used previously for explaining familial and friendship connections in *Mahapurush* (*The Holy Man*).

Sounds of electric fans, gunshots, children calling playmates, belligerent crowds, and an object smashing on a factory floor resonate optimally here.

Editing is brisk in transitions, impressively retarded for intimate scenes, hectic in scans of factory uproar and flashbacks to Syamelendu's younger days.

Ray's own accompanying music is well matched to visual action. It's somewhat noir-like in tone, with a handful of Indian intrusions, usually occasioned by Tutul's preference for native compositions.

At the center of this masterpiece is a virtually flawless screenplay which presents capsule characterizations through incisively revealing dialogue free of popular clichés and artificial literary ornamentation. The scene in which Tutul comments on her male comrade's neglect of his disorderly library is most telling. He seeks information and wisdom solely from present sources, ignoring preserved guidance from past experiences. Ray is also an exemplary judge of

when to simply allow silence to carry the load rather than a string of vapid, meaningless chattering.

Even if it fell a trifle short of his accomplishment in the follow-up black comedy classic *Jana Aranya* (*The Middle Man*), Ray achieved in this outing an unforgettable depiction of one man's slide into corporate cynicism and moral compromise. Too strong an indictment for even teenage viewers, *Seemabaddha* makes for robust adult film fare. Subtitles are readable from start to finish, not always the case with Ray pictures. This one is hard to access, so avail yourself of the opportunity to do so locally by borrowing it from the Heritage Church Library. You will not regret devoting two hours to absorption in this penetrating and formidable drama.

