**RAY, Satyajit (b. 2 May 1921, Calcutta, India; d. 23 April 1992, Kolkatta, West Bengal, India)**

Satyajit Ray was an Indian filmmaker, writer, music director and illustrator, considered among the greatest auteur-directors of twentieth-century cinema, along with the likes of Akira Kurosawa, Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini and Andrei Tarkovsky. Born in an illustrious family of intellectuals who epitomized the high-point of Bengal Renaissance of late nineteenth-century, Ray studied economics and fine arts before going on to join the British advertising firm D.J. Keymer in 1943 where he worked as visual designer. The experience of watching Vittorio De Sica’s neorealist masterpiece *Bicycle Thieves* while in a company-sponsored training trip in London in 1950 inspired Ray to become a film-maker. He would go on to make thirty-six feature films in a career spanning over three decades and marked by numerous accolades, including the Legion of Honour in 1987 and the Honorary Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement which Ray received in his hospital bed in Kolkata in 30 March, 1992.

Making his directorial debut with *Pather Panchali* (*The Song of the Road*) in 1955 – a film that would win eleven international awards including The Best Human Documentary at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival – Ray established himself as a film-maker who combined the Western cinematic vocabulary with stories essentially and emotionally located in Indian contexts. *Pather* Panchali, along with *Aparajto* [*The Unvanquished*] (1956) and *Apu Sansar* (*The World of Apu*, 1959) is part of the landmark *Apu Trilogy*, which is based on the work of the Bengali novelist Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay. The trilogy is situated in the early part of the twentieth century, and the narrative traces the life of the young Apu, who belongs to a poor Bengali family. Ray’s trilogy played a foundational role in establishing the movement called the “Indian Parallel Cinema”. Many of Ray’s films dealt with topics that ranged from fairy tales to political satires, rural poverty to urban discontent in post-Independence India. Ray adapted the works of other literary giants such as Henric Ibsen and Rabindranath Tagore, whom he considered to be his mentor. *Charulata* (*The Lonely Wife*, 1964), one of Ray’s most successful film is based on Tagore’s novella *Nahtanir* (*The Broken Nest*, 1901); the film is more experimental than Ray’s earlier films, and is one of the best example of the influence of modernist cinema on Ray.

A prolific writer of popular detective fiction who still features in the Indian fiction bestseller lists, Ray made the detective films *Sonar Kella* (*The Golden Fortress*) in 1971 and *Joy Baba Felunath* (*The Elephant God*) in 1979, shooting at the exotic locations of The Thar Desert in Rajasthan and the Ganges Ghats in Benares. *The Golden Fortress* also deals with the science of parapsychology, a branch of study that engages with telepathy and extrasensory perception whose advocates included the psychologists Max Dessoir and William James. The cinematic techniques Ray appropriated often included the Modernist stream-of-consciousness narrative, perhaps most poignantly depicted in Ray’s 1966 film *Nayak* (*The Hero*) a film featuring the human subconscious in a real and symbolic journey across time. Ray often dealt with the disturbing dialectic of physical reality and meta-physical experience and in this he shares the Modernist ambivalence about the objective world and its subjective experience. The political quality of the magic realism in Ray’s cinematic narratives – such as *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (*The Adventures of Goophy and Bagha*, 1969) and *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (*The Kingdom of Diamonds*, 1980) – had attracted the personal admiration of writers such as V.S.Naipaul, Saul Bellow and Salman Rushdie. Popular as well as intellectually stimulating in its formal innovations, disturbing as well as engaging in its content, Ray’s cinematic oeuvre is justifiably considered a classic in time.

**References and further reading:**

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**Select Filmography:**

*Pather Panchali* (*The Song of the Road*, 1955)

*Aparajto* (*The Unvanquished*, 1956)

*Apu Sansar* (*The World of Apu*, 1959)

*Charulata* (*The Lonely Wife*, 1964)

*Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (*The Adventures of Goophy and Bagha*,1969)

*Sonar Kella* (*The Golden Fortress*, 1971)

*Shatranj ke Khiladi* (*The Chess Players*, 1977)

*Joy Baba Felunath* (*The Elephant God*, 1979)

*Hirak Rajar Deshe* (*The Kingdom of Diamonds*, 1980)

*Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*, 1984)

*Agantuk* (*The Stranger*, 1992)

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