

## Document Citation

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Title         | <b>An epic of eavesdropping</b>               |
| Author(s)     |   |
| Source        | <i>Publisher name not available</i>           |
| Date          |   |
| Type          | article                                       |
| Language      | English                                       |
| Pagination    |   |
| No. of Pages  | 1   |
| Subjects      |   |
| Film Subjects | Mahanagar (The big city), Ray, Satyajit, 1963 |

## An Epic of Eavesdropping

**The Big City.** The harrowing beauty of Satyajit Ray's film making is not easy to analyze. It is a quality both evanescent and palpable, as if the Indian director had found a way to take the lens off his camera and allow life itself to touch the raw film. Whether or not Ray's latest film to reach the U.S. is his masterpiece is beside the point; each of his works is a version of perfection.

Into a squalid Calcutta tenement apartment six lives are crowded: a gentle, ineffectual bank clerk, his wife and their small son, his parents and his sister. Money is scarce, and the wife takes a job selling home appliances from door to door. The old couple are shocked by the idea of a woman working. The husband's pride, too, is wounded, but the bank fails and he must accept the fact that the wife is now the family's sole breadwinner. In the end, she quarrels with her employer and quits. Husband and wife join hands to find new jobs.

Out of this disarmingly simple tale, Ray has fashioned a superlative quiet epic, an eloquent testimonial to the innate courage of ordinary people facing ordinary problems. But his film is about more than its story. Without once forcing a point or losing faith in the viewer's ability to think for himself, he offers a fascinating study of a complex, shifting society, the urban Indian middle class caught in the clash of native tradition and the lingering relics of the British raj.

As Ray dissects this slice of Indian life, he works outward from individual characters toward general truths. His young couple are well enough educated to cope with the city's mechanized realities, yet bound to an ancient morality. The husband (Anil Chatterjee) can accept the fact of his wife's working, but not the lipstick she must use on the job. The wife (Madhabi Mukherjee) looks with childlike eagerness upon her newly won status, but goes to pieces before the in-laws' condemnation.

Ray fuses sight and sound into a single artistic unity. His people speak in a

curious linguistic mélange, basically Bengali but liberally daubed with English stock phrases. His musical background, which he himself composed, is a similar fluid mixture in which a line of Oriental melody moves imperceptibly toward a Western cadence.

Ray's camera seeks no tricks or fancy angles. It looks straight ahead and sees everything. It finds beauty in a troubled face shot through a mosquito net, in a small boy's total joy over a new plaything, in an old man's tortured struggle with a crossword puzzle. His camera, in short, merely eavesdrops on everyday life.

DAVID GAHR



CHATTERJEE & MUKHERJEE IN "CITY"  
*Looking straight and seeing everything.*