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New Picture

Pather Panchali (Edward Harrison). One day in 1952, a 31-year-old commercial artist in Calcutta went down to the pawnshop with his wife's jewels. Then he rented an ancient Wall camera, and on the first fine Sunday after that, he rounded up a few actor friends, piled them into a taxi, and headed upcountry to a picturesque village he knew. There and thereabouts, heedless of the fact that he had never shot a foot of film in his life, Satyajit Ray (pronounced Sawt-yaw-jit Rye) plugged away at his movie project whenever he had a day off from his paying job. After about a year and a half of Sunday shooting, he persuaded the West Bengali provincial government to finance the production as a sort of animated travel poster. A

17). Directed by Satyajit Ray, *Pather Panchali* opened recently in Manhattan's Fifth Avenue Cinema, it smashed the house attendance record set by *Gervaise*, and the distributor now reports that dozens of exhibitors are begging for prints.

Pather Panchali—English translation: *The Lament of the Path*—tells a tragedy of family life in a small village. The family—every member of which is unforgettably portrayed in the most natural style imaginable—is Brahman. The father is a priest, a decent, impractical man, "bursting with ideas for plays and poems" that he never publishes, making what money he can as a rent collector. The mother is a sensible, hard-working homemaker, warm-hearted but hard pressed to make ends meet. It is difficult enough to keep the children, a schoolboy named Apu and a



FAMILY FACES FROM "PATHER"
A tragedy lived with energy, fullness and gentle humor.

year later *Pather Panchali* was in the can. But when the members of the provincial government saw the picture, they were badly shaken. They had put up the better part of the production cost (\$38,640) for a travelogue, and what was this peculiar thing they had got?

It happened to be a masterpiece. *Pather Panchali* is perhaps the finest piece of filmed folklore since Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*. It is a pastoral poem dappled with the play of brilliant images and strong, dark feelings, a luminous revelation of Indian life in language that all the world can understand. In the three years since *Pather Panchali* was released, it has won five grand prizes at film festivals from Cannes to San Francisco. And everywhere discriminating moviegoers have plied the turnstiles in modest but impressive numbers—everywhere, that is, except in the U.S., where the film played only in San Francisco's Vogue Theater. For almost two years the managers of Manhattan's 36 art theaters disdainfully refused the screen space to "that sacred-cow opera, the kind of picture the critics love and the customers hate" (TIME, Feb.

teen-age girl named Durga, properly fed and clothed. As for the old aunt, as far as the mother is concerned it would be an unmixed blessing for everybody if she would drop dead.

The scenes of poverty and death that fill this film might be expected to make it a depressing one, but curiously they do not. For one thing, the radiant beauty of the picture continually lifts the spirit. With a grace reminiscent of the old Rajput painters, Moviemaker Ray arranges his visions of the natural world—the water lilies that flicker on a pond, the lily pads that flap in a sudden gale, the rain that batters at a young girl's face—in frame after frame of temperate loveliness. Moreover, the family somehow transcends its tragedy by the very energy and fullness with which the tragedy is lived. The director has a sense of life far larger than the merely tragic. Moreover, he has humor. The picture bubbles over with gentle laughter at the absurd things people do and are, and the set pieces of comedy—a day at school, a band concert, a visit to the village theater—are just about as funny as organized humor can get.