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Humanist Masterworks: The Films of Satyajit Ray

In the three films which comprise Satyajit Ray's Apu Trilogy, the director charts the experiences of a young boy who faces great hardships as he leaves his family to attend school and mature as an adult. Ray's films have offered a similar trajectory revealing the complexities of life in post-colonial India, a country bound by its traditions yet working to become more modern. Over the course of his career, Ray emerged with a style unlike his Bollywood contemporaries and has come to be regarded as one of the great humanist filmmakers, along with Ozu, Renoir and De Sica. Although social context is always evident in his work, the struggles of the individual carry even greater emotional power. For the past twelve years, Ray's work has been the focus of an ongoing restoration project headed by the Academy Film Archive and the Satyajit Ray Film And Study Collection at University of California, Santa Cruz. This program presented in collaboration with the South Asia Initiative at Harvard includes a selection of titles recently restored by these venerated institutions. This program features a special appearance by Shyam Benegal, a contemporary of Ray who will introduce both his documentary about Ray and his own most recent feature.

This program is co-presented with the South Asia Initiative at Harvard University. Special thanks to the Academy Film Archive and Dilip Basu of the Satyajit Ray Film and Study Collection at University of California, Santa Cruz.

Director Shyam Benegal In Person

◆ November 5 (Friday) 6 pm

Netaji: The Last Hero

Directed by Shyam Benegal

India 2004, 35mm, color, 210 min.

With Sachin Khedekar, Jishu Sengupta

ACCOMPLISHED DIRECTOR Shyam Benegal emerged over the past thirty years as the heir to the filmmaking legacy of Satyajit Ray, both of whom were noted for their use of literary adaptations in realist contexts. Benegal recently completed a biopic of the great Indian freedom fighter, Subhas Chandra Bose, and will premiere his work at the opening of this retrospective.

Director Shyam Benegal In Person

◆ November 6 (Saturday) 7 pm

Satyajit Ray

Directed by Shyam Benegal

India 1984, 35mm, color, 140 min.

AFTER SURVIVING a near-fatal heart attack in 1984, an ailing Ray agreed to participate in extensive interviews with Shyam Benegal for this moving reflection on his life's work. In the film, he discusses the influence of his family on his filmmaking career (strands of narrative which become evident in the Apu Trilogy among other works) and how he found a new way to express himself through cinema.

◆ November 10 (Wednesday) 9 pm

◆ November 13 (Saturday) 6 pm

Pather Panchali

Directed by Satyajit Ray

India 1955, 35mm, b/w, 115 min.

With Subir Bannerjee, Kany Bannerjee,

Karuna Bannerjee

Bengali with English subtitles

RAY BELIEVED THAT THE SCENARIO for his first film, adapted from the popular novel by Bhibuti Bhasan Bannerjee, could serve to establish a new artistic cinema for India. Inspired by Italian Neorealism, the films of Jean Renoir, and the work of writer/philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, *Pather Panchali* places India and its traditions into the form of a forceful modern art: realistic cinema. Telling the story of a poor Bengali scholar and writer and his wife and two children, the film makes wonderful use of exteriors and of professional and non-professional actors, who seem inseparable from the characters they play. We are taken deep into family life and especially the world of the children, who venture out to discover the wonders and difficulties of life, the pettiness of humanity, and the violence of nature.



Satyajit Ray Charulata 1964

Harvard Film Archive Fall 2004

DIRECTORS IN FOCUS

Humanist Masterworks: The Films of Satyajit Ray

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Satyajit Ray *Pather Panchali* 1962

Introduced by Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs at Harvard University

◆ November 12 (Friday) 7 pm
The Music Room (*Jalsaghar*)
Directed by Satyajit Ray
India 1958, 35mm, b/w, 100 min.
With Chhabi Biswas, Padmadevi, Pinaki Sengupta
Bengali with English subtitles
THIS FILM IS A wonderfully evocative anecdote about an elderly aristocrat, slowly dying amid the crumbling splendors of the past, who decides to defy the encroaching egalitarian age. For all the rough edges, the film exhibits the more polished elements of Welles' *Citizen Kane* as the aging aristocrat sits alone in his Xanadu, dreaming amid the remnants of past magnificence while the bulldozers of modern civilization hum outside the walls. He rebels in a gesture of glorious folly, bankrupting himself to hire the best classical musicians around, dust off the vast chandelier, and bring his ancestral music room to glittering life.

◆ November 12 (Friday) 9 pm
◆ November 13 (Saturday) 8 pm
Aparajito
Directed by Satyajit Ray
India 1957, 35mm, b/w, 127 min.
With Pinaki Sengupta, Smaran Ghosal, Kanu Bannerjee
Bengali with English Subtitles
THE SECOND PART of Ray's famed trilogy follows Apu to the city where his father finds him a job to support his family. Declaring himself a dramatist fearless in confronting the darker side of adolescence, Ray cinematically explores the impact of death as well as the clash between spiritual duty and secular enticement as he examines the experience of ordinary people struggling to survive.

◆ November 13 (Saturday) 10 pm
◆ November 14 (Sunday) 9 pm
The World of Apu (*Apur Sansar*)
Directed by Satyajit Ray
India 1959, 35mm, b/w, 117 min.
With Soumitra Chatterjee, Sharmila Tagore, Alok Chakravarty
Bengali with English subtitles
HAVING WEATHERED THE DEATHS of his closest family members, Apu (Chatterjee) comes to Calcutta in search of a new life of independence. He finds work as a writer and enjoys a pseudo-bohemian existence until he is called upon by a friend to fill in at an arranged marriage. Despite his attempts to remain isolated from the world, Apu is confronted by the joys of love and the hardship of loss. The film is imbued with keen observation and moving performances and serves as a fitting coda to this remarkable trilogy.

◆ November 17 (Wednesday) 9 pm
Devi
Directed by Satyajit Ray
India 1960, 35mm, b/w, 93 min.
With Chhabi Biswas, Soumitra Chatterjee, Sharmila Tagore
Bengali with English subtitles
A CAREFULLY NUANCED STUDY in religious obsession, Ray's film centers on Biswas, a man convinced that his young daughter-in-law Tagore is in fact the goddess Kali reincarnated. Baroque and melodramatic, both in terms of its images and its story, it mounts a lucid and very moving argument against the destructive nature of fanaticism and superstition, as Tagore gradually loses all sense of her own individuality. The film is full of striking images and provides intriguing glimpses into religious fervor on the sub-continent.

Introduced by Amartya Sen, Lamont University Professor of Economics at Harvard University

◆ November 19 (Friday) 7 pm
The Big City (*Mahanagar*)
Directed by Satyajit Ray
India 1963, 35mm, b/w, 122 min.
With Anil Chatterjee, Madhabi Mukherjee, Jaya Bhaduri
Bengali with English subtitles
A STRONG-WILLED HOUSEWIFE decides to find a job to supplement her family's meager income. Despite the challenge to convention, she becomes a door-to-door salesperson for a manufacturer of sewing machines. Although she establishes herself well within the industry, her family pressures her to quit until a shift in their fortunes changes her standing among them. Recalling the subtle comedies of Yasujiro Ozu, the film tempers the family's dire financial situation with the often humorous presence of anglicized Indian characters who proudly defy tradition.

◆ November 19 (Friday) 9:15 pm
◆ November 20 (Saturday) 9 pm
Charulata (aka *The Lonely Wife*)
Directed by Satyajit Ray
India 1964, 35mm, b/w, 117 min.
With Soumitra Chatterjee, Madhabi Mukherjee, Shaileen Mukherjee
Bengali with English subtitles
IN ONE of his most enduring masterpieces, Satyajit Ray paired two of his favorite actors. Madhabi Mukherjee plays the childless Calcutta housewife Charulata, who feels neglected by her career-oriented husband. Soumitra Chatterjee (who appeared in fifteen of Ray's films) is the husband's dynamic cousin Amal, to whom Charulata develops a deep attachment. Encouraged by Amal to pursue her writing, Charulata undergoes an intellectual and sexual awakening that neither her husband nor late nineteenth-century Bengali society is quite ready

for. Ray depicts his heroine's growing self-awareness through subtle poetic shifts in visual composition and an uncharacteristically Bollywoodesque musical performance.

◆ November 20 (Saturday) 7 pm
◆ November 21 (Sunday) 9:15 pm
Days and Nights in the Forest (*Aranyer Din Ratri*)
Directed by Satyajit Ray
India 1970, 35mm, b/w, 115 min.
With Soumitra Chatterjee, Subhendu Chatterjee, Samit Bhanja
Bengali with English subtitles
FOUR MEN FROM CALCUTTA leave their urban world behind for a brief sojourn in the forests of Palamu. With no formal plans for lodging, the men coerce and cajole the local villagers into providing accommodations for them. As the excursion continues, they experience a series of mishaps which reveal their own naïveté about life outside the comfortable city environs. With shades of Renoir's *A Day in the Country*, Ray's light surface is penetrated by a sharp critique of imperialism and its effects on contemporary Indian life.

◆ November 21 (Sunday) 7 pm
The Chess Players (*Shatranj ke Khiladi*)
Directed by Satyajit Ray
India 1977, 35mm, color, 129 min.
With Sanjeev Kumar, Saeed Jaffrey, Richard Attenborough
English/Urdu with English subtitles
IN RAY'S FIRST BIG-BUDGET FILM for which he employed not only some of the major stars of the Bollywood scene (Kumar, Jaffrey) but also notable western actors (Attenborough), two aristocrats obsessed with chess meet daily for a match while remaining oblivious to the upheaval and turmoil around them. Set in Lucknow circa 1856, the story of the chess players is paralleled by that of a monarch who ignores the impending threat of British territorial expansion so that he may engage in his own creative pursuits. Despite the film's very serious historical context, Ray presents it with a delicate, humorous touch.

◆ November 23 (Tuesday) 9 pm
The Stranger (*Agantuk*)
Directed by Satyajit Ray
India/France 1991, 35mm, color, 97 min.
With Depankar De, Mamata Shankar, Bikram Bannerjee
Bengali with English subtitles
HIS FINAL CINEMATIC TESTAMENT, Ray's *The Stranger* is a humorous but somewhat saddening film that follows the sudden appearance of Manmohan into the lives of an average middle class family in Calcutta. Claiming to be their long lost uncle and reeling with stories of his travels in the West, Manmohan enters the family's life abruptly, causing a stir which affects each family member in different ways. A wonderful and amusingly biting satire on urban civilization, this film comes as a fascinating endpoint to a brilliant career.

SPECIAL REDUCED ADMISSION TO THE APU TRILOGY ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13 – 3 FILMS FOR \$15