

## Document Citation

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**A**LTHOUGH India each year turns out more than twice as many pictures as our own studios, the number that find their way to these shores is pitifully small. The reasons are not hard to understand—at least, not once you have seen a few of them. Physically, the standard Indian movie resembles the skimpiest Hollywood product of a decade ago. Hastily made, thinly budgeted, their acting is wooden, their stories cliché, their settings sleazy. Furthermore, the Indians seem to like their movies long and studded with musical numbers. Every ten minutes or so, no matter how somber the scene, someone is bound to break into a song or a troupe of dancing girls whirls by. Actually, to Occidental eyes these are the most interesting moments in the pictures. For potential American distributors, however, they pose a real problem. Obviously, no American audience is going to sit through upwards of three hours of indifferent movie making, no matter how exotic. But what should be cut, the story or the music? Most distributors have side-stepped this dilemma by simply not handling Indian features.

At last, however, it has occurred to someone in India that the camera need not be used solely to reproduce shabby variants of the same trite formulae. It could be used to show the world the everyday life of the Indian people rather than *papier-maché* palace romances. It could be used to engender sympathy and understanding for the Indian peasant, in much the same way that the films of the Italian neo-realists won regard for the poor of their native land. Indeed, it was the neo-realism of Vittorio De Sica, along with the humanism of such giants as Jean Renoir and Robert Flaherty, that directly inspired Satyajit Ray to make his much-honored “*Pather Panchali*”

(Harrison). Although based on an Indian novel, it emerges as essentially a series of closely observed, sensitively recorded incidents that happen to a humble family living in wretched poverty in a small Benares village.

By every ordinary standard, the film is sprawling and shapeless, lacking in either dramatic values or narrative drive. But Mr. Ray was not trying to tell an ordinary story. He wanted to provide an insight into a way of life, to make us see the poverty and hardship, the love and tenderness, and the ineffable grace of gesture and ceremony that are the daily routine of millions of his countrymen. In a sense, his film is a documentary, but with none of the rigors that the word so often implies. It is a *human* documentary, a rich and often beautiful, often poignant introduction to a people we need to know more about. “*Pather Panchali*” is the first film in a projected trilogy: in the second section, “*Aparajito*” (which captured top honors at Venice just a year ago), Mr. Ray moves his hard-pressed little family from the country to Calcutta. Clearly, a national epic is in the making.

### **‘Pather Panchali’ Still at Vogue**

“*Pather Panchali*,” which is now being shown at the Vogue, has been shown before this engagement only at the New York Museum of Modern Art, at a special showing at the University of California, and at the recent International Film Festival here, where it won two of the four prizes.