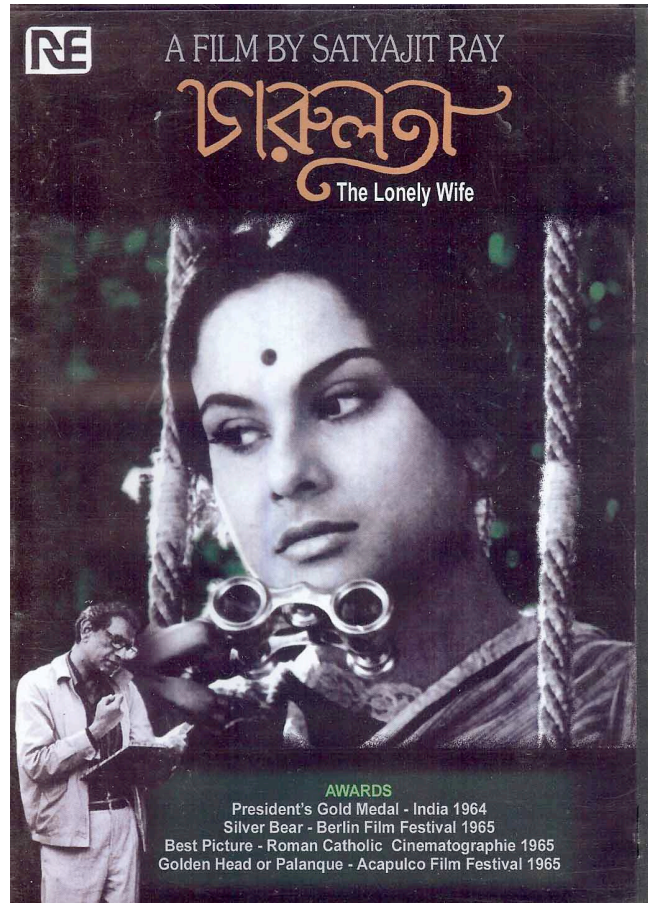


Directed by Satyajit Ray
Written by Rabindranath Tagore ... (from the story "Nastaneer")
Cinematography by Subrata Mitra

Soumitra Chatterjee ... Amal
Madhabi Mukherjee ... Charulata
Shailen Mukherjee ... Bhupati Dutta

SATYAJIT RAY (director) (b. May 2, 1921 in Calcutta, West Bengal, British India [now India]—d. April 23, 1992 (age 70) in Calcutta, West Bengal, India) directed 37 films and TV shows, including 1991 *The Stranger*, 1990 *Branches of the Tree*, 1989 *An Enemy of the People*, 1987 *Sukumar Ray* (Short documentary), 1984 *The Home and the World*, 1984 "Deliverance" (TV Movie), 1981 "Pikoor Diary" (TV Short), 1980 *The Kingdom of Diamonds*, 1979 *Joi Baba Felunath: The Elephant God*, 1977 *The Chess Players*, 1976 *Bala*, 1976 *The Middleman*, 1974 *The Golden Fortress*, 1973 *Distant Thunder*, 1972 *The Inner Eye*, 1972 *Company Limited*, 1971 *Sikkim* (Documentary), 1970 *The Adversary*, 1970 *Days and Nights in the Forest*, 1969 *The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha*, 1967 *The Zoo*, 1966 *Nayak: The Hero*, 1965 "Two" (TV Short), 1965 *The Holy Man*, 1965 *The Coward*, 1964 *Charulata*, 1963 *The Big City*, 1962 *The Expedition*, 1962 *Kanchenjunga*, 1961 *Rabindranath Tagore* (Documentary), 1961 *Teen Kanya*, 1960 *The Goddess*, 1959 *The World of Apu*, 1958 *Paras-Pathar*, 1958 *The Music Room*, 1956 *Aparajito*, and 1955 *Pather Panchali*.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE (writer—"Nastaneer") (b. May 6, 1861 in Calcutta, West Bengal, British India [now India]—d. August 7, 1941 (age 80) in Santiniketan, West Bengal, British India [now India]) is an Indian writer, whose poems have provided the lyrics for least 60 films and whose fiction has provided the basis of dozens of films, among them 2013 *The Last Poem* (story), 2012 *Gora* (TV Mini-Series), 2012 *Elar Char Adhyay*, 2011 *Kashmakash* (story), 2010 *Ego - That Differs* (Short) (story), 2010 *Dark Waters* (Video short—story), 2008 *Four Chapters* (novel), 2004 *Shasti*, 2003 *Choker Bali: A Passion Play* (novel), 1996 *Rabibar* (story), 1984 *Didi* (story - as Kabiguru Rabindranath Thakur), 1984 *The Home and the World*



(novel), 1979 *Naukadubi* (story), 1974 *Jadu Bansa* (lyrics), 1974 *Bisarjan* (story - as Kaviguru Rabindranath), 1969 *Atithi* (story), 1964 *Charulata* (from the story "Nastaneer"), 1961 *Kabuliwala* (story), 1961 *Teen Kanya* (stories), 1960 *Khoka Babur Pratyabartan* (story - as Kabiguru Rabindranath), 1960 *Kshudhita Pashan* (story), 1957 *Kabuliwala* (story), 1956 *Charana Daasi* (novel "Nauka Doobi" - uncredited), 1947 *Naukadubi* (story), 1938 *Gora* (story), 1938 *Chokher Bali* (novel), 1932 *Naukadubi* (novel), 1932 *Chirakumar Sabha*, 1929 *Giribala* (writer), 1927 *Balidan* (play), and 1923 *Maanbhanjan* (story).

SUBRATA MITRA (cinematographer) (b. October 12, 1930 in Calcutta, West Bengal, India—d. December 8, 2001 (age 71) in Calcutta, West Bengal, India) was the cinematographer for 18 films, which are 1986 *New Delhi Times*, 1974 *Mahatma and the Mad Boy* (Short), 1970 *Bombay Talkie*, 1969 *Dong fu ren*, 1969 *The Guru*, 1967 *Teesri Kasam*, 1966 *Nayak: The Hero*, 1965 *Shakespeare-Wallah*, 1964 *Charulata*, 1963 *The Householder*, 1963 *The Big City*, 1962 *Kanchenjunga*, 1960 *The Goddess*, 1959 *The World of Apu*, 1958 *Paras-Pathar*, 1958 *The Music Room*, 1956 *Aparajito*, and 1955 *Pather Panchali*.

SOUMITRA CHATTERJEE ... Amal (b. Soumitra Chattapadhaya, January 19, 1935 in Krishnanagar, India) appeared in 146 films and television shows, among them 2013 *Not a Fairy Tale*, 2013 *The Nowhere Son*, 2013 *Shunyo Awnko: Act Zero*, 2013 *Maach*

Mishti & More, 2012 *Shirshendu's Diary*, 2012 *Afterglow*, 2012 *Hemlock Society*, 2012 *Aparajita Tumi*, 2011 *Nobel Thief*, 2010 *Bodhisatva*, 2009 *Kaalbela*, 2006 *The Bong Connection*, 2005 *Critical Encounter*, 2005 *15 Park Avenue*, 2004 *Shadows of Time*, 1999 *Malaise*, 1994 *Wheel Chair*, 1990 *Branches of the Tree*, 1989 *An Enemy of the People*, 1984 *The Home and the World*, 1983 *Indira*, 1980 *The Kingdom of Diamonds*, 1974 *The Golden Fortress*, 1974 *Sangini*, 1974 *Jadi Jantem*, 1973 *Distant Thunder*, 1970 *Days and Nights in the Forest*, 1965 *Akash Kusum*, 1965 *The Coward*, 1965 *Ek Tuku Basa*, 1964 *Pratinidhi*, 1964 *Kinu Gowalar Gali*, 1964 *Charulata*, 1963 *Saat Pake Bandha*, 1962 *The Expedition*, 1961 *Teen Kanya*, 1960 *The Goddess*, and 1959 *The World of Apu*.

MADHABI MUKHERJEE ... Charulata (b. Madhuri Mukherjee, 1943) appeared in 59 films and television shows, including 2013 *Bakita Byaktigato*, 2000 *The Festival*, 1992 *Daan Pratidaan*, 1988 *Portrait of a Life*, 1987 *Pratihar*, 1982 *Matir Swarga*, 1981 *Subarnalata*, 1981 *Manikchand*, 1973 *Bon Palashir Padabali*, 1972 *Letter from the Wife*, 1971 *Calcutta 71*, 1966 *Joradighir Chowdhury Paribar*, 1965 *Thana Theke Aschi*, 1965 *The Golden Thread*, 1965 *The Coward*, 1964 *Godhuli Belaye*, 1964 *Binsati Janani*, 1964 *Charulata*, 1963 *The Big City*, 1961 *Aaj Kal Parshu*, 1960 *Baishey Shravana*, 1956 *Tonsil*, and 1950 *Kankantala Light Railway*.

SHAILEN MUKHERJEE ... Bhupati Dutta appeared in 40 films and TV shows, among them 1994 *Ami-O-Maa*, 1981 *Nyaya Anyay*, 1980 *Paka Dekha*, 1975 *Aparajita*, 1974 *The Golden Fortress*, 1969 *The Fiancee*, 1967 *The Zoo*, 1965 *Mukhujey Paribar*, 1964 *Charulata*, 1963 *Saat Pake Bandha*, 1963 *The Big City*, 1962 *Rakta Palash*, 1961 *Jhinder Bandi*, 1959 *Agnisambhabha*, 1959 *Gali Theke Rajpath*, 1959 *Derso Khokhar Kando*, 1959 *The Holy Island*, 1959 *Neel Akasher Neechey*, and



1957 *Harano Sur*.

“Satyajit Ray,” from *World Film Directors V.II*, ed. John Wakeman. The H.W.Wilson Co. NY 1988, entry by Philip Kemp

Indian director, scenarist, composer, was born in Calcutta into an exceptionally talented family prominent in Bengali arts and letters.

The ground floor of the large family house was occupied by the printing firm founded by Ray’s grandfather, Upendrakishore Ray, a writer, artist, musician, and publisher. His eldest son, Sukumar, Ray’s father, was also famous as a writer

and artist; the nonsense verses that he wrote for children, with his own illustrations, have become much-loved classics. Ray’s mother, Suprabha Das, was a noted amateur singer. Both parents were members of the Brahmo sect, a liberal and reformist version of Hinduism which rejected the caste system.

On his father’s death in 1915 Sukumar, Ray’s father inherited the printing and publishing business, but he lacked financial acumen. When he himself died in 1923 of blackwater fever, the company was near collapse. It was liquidated three years later, and Suprabha Ray took Satyajit, her only child, to live in the house of her younger brother., P. K. Das. The Das household was comfortably off, not particularly literary but highly musical. Ray developed an abiding love of classical music, both Indian and western. He also became a keen cinemagoer. “I was a regular film fan. But I don’t know when it became serious. At some point, I began to take notes in the dark on cutting.” The movies he watched were almost exclusively western. “The cinemas showing Indian films. . . were dank and seedy. . . . The films they showed us, we were told by our elders, were not suitable for us.”

Ray grew up in Calcutta, where he was educated at Ballygunj Government School and then from 1936 to 1940 at Presidency College, majoring in science and economics. After graduating, he attended the “world university” founded by Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan, some 130 miles from Calcutta. Tagore, the dominant figure of the Indian cultural renaissance, prolifically gifted as writer, painter and composer, had been a close friend of Ray’s father and grandfather, “though by 1940 (the year before his death) he had become a venerable figure whom Ray was too diffident to approach. His influence, though, was all-pervasive, especially in the teaching of all the arts as closely interrelated.”

At first, Ray “wasn’t particularly keen to leave Calcutta. I was too much of a city person, and Santiniketan was . . . miles from nowhere. But . . . the professors I studied under were great artists. Not just painters, but people with vision, with understanding, with deep insight.

I think everything [they taught me] has gone into my work. . . . I read a tremendous lot. . . novels, Indian literature, western literature, everything.”

After two and a half years at Santiniketan, “my most important formative years,” Ray left abruptly in 1942 to return to Calcutta, when news came the Japanese had bombed the city. He found work as a layout artist with a British-rum advertising agency, D. J. Keymer & Co. He stayed with the firm for ten years, rising to senior art director. Increasingly, though, cinema overrode his other interests. “While I sat at my office desk sketching out campaigns for tea and biscuits, my mind buzzed with thoughts of the films I had been seeing. . . . By the time the war ended, I had taken out subscriptions to most of the film magazines in the English language and snapped up every film book I could lay my hands on.”

As an exercise, he began writing scenarios based on books that were about to be filmed, so as to compare his ideas with the treatment that later appeared on the screen/ He also prepared an adaptation of one of his favorite novels, Tagore’s *Ghare-Baire* (*The Home and the World*), which he offered to a film producer. It was like and plans for production were initiated. They soon foundered, however, for Ray adamantly rejected all the producer’s suggestions for changes aimed at increasing the

film's popular appeal. "I felt like a pricked balloon at the time, but I can now say...that I consider it the greatest good fortune that the film was not made. Reading the screenplay now I can see how pitifully superficial and Hollywoodish it was." He never abandoned his plan to film the Tagore novel, though it would be nearly forty years in reaching the screen.

In terms of quantity India ranked with the US & Japan as major filmmaking countries, along with the United States and Japan....Quality, though, was another matter. To most cultures Indians, their country's films were a joke or a source of embarrassment. Few Indian films were shown abroad, except to expatriate communities; on the rare occasions they were, as Ray wrote in a 1948 article, "even out best films have to be accepted with the gently apologetic proviso that it is 'after all an Indian film.'"

The typical Indian movie, whether comedy, romantic melodrama, or "mythological," was constructed to a rigid formula, often summed up as "a star, six songs, three dances." Heroes, heroines, and villains were stereotyped and unambiguous; plots were crude, and acting cruder; settings were stiflingly studio-bound; and the action, with blithe disregard of dramatic logic, would be regularly halted for lavish musical interludes, sung or danced. Eroticism featured heavily, but could be expressed only by languishing looks and voluptuous movements, since censorship (and popular morality) forbade any depiction of sexual contact more torrid than a handclasp.... In the forty years of its existence Indian cinema had yet to produce a single director, or even a single film, of unequivocal world stature. Ray ascribed this failure to two major factors. First, that Indian filmmakers had never grasped the essential nature of cinema: "It would seem that the fundamental concept of a coherent dramatic pattern existing in time was generally misunderstood." Secondly, misguided attempts to emulate foreign movies, especially those of Hollywood: "What our cinema needs above everything else," Ray proclaimed, "is a style, an idiom. . . which would be uniquely and recognizably Indian."

His ambition was to create, singlehandedly if necessary, this uniquely Indian style and idiom. In 1947, the year of independence, Ray and his friend Chidananda Das Gupta had founded Calcutta's first film society, "thereby shackling ourselves willingly to the task of disseminating film culture among the intelligentsia." He also began writing articles in an iconoclastic vein: "I had thought my explosive piece would shake the Bengali cinema to its foundation and lead to a massive heart-searching among our filmmakers. Nothing of the sort happened. The piece was simply shrugged off...as yet another piece of tomfoolery by some arrogant upstart who ...knew nothing of local needs and local conditions."

By 1948 Ray's increasing salary at Keymer's enabled him to provide an independent home for himself and his mother. In March of the next year he married his cousin, Bijoya Das. They had grown up together and shared many of the same interests, including a love of cinema. Their son Sandip was born in 1953. In addition to his advertising work, Ray, by now considered one of Calcutta's leading graphic artists, was often commissioned to illustrate books. One such commission, in 1946, was for an abridged edition of a modern classic, Bibbhu Bhusan Banerjee's novel *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Little Road*). Ever since, he had been considering turning this story into

a film that he would both script and direct. Two events helped push his ideas into reality.

In 1949 Jean Renoir arrived in Calcutta to make *The River*. Overcoming his shyness, Ray called on him and found him "not only approachable, but so embarrassingly polite and modest that I felt if I were not too careful I would probably find myself discoursing on the Future of Cinema for his benefit." Ray helped Renoir scout locations, watched him filming whenever possible, and eventually mentioned his own plans. Renoir was full of encouragement. If only, he said, Indian filmmakers "could shake Hollywood out of your system and evolve your own style, you would be making great films here."

In April 1950 Keymer's sent Ray and his wife on a six-month trip to London, where the company had its head office. "Doubtless the management hoped that I would come back a full-fledged advertising man....What the trip did in fact was to set the seal of doom on my advertising career. Within three days of arriving in London I saw *Bicycle Thieves*. I knew immediately that if I ever made *Pather Panchali*. . . I would make it in the same way, using natural locations and unknown actors."

Back in Calcutta, Ray began trying to set up his project. Scenario in hand he visited every producer in the city. Not all of them laughed at him. A few expressed genuine interest: given a reputable director, some well-known stars....Ray realized that to make the film he wanted, he would have to finance it himself. He scraped together all his savings, borrowed from his relatives, raised a loan on his life insurance, and hired some equipment, including "an old, much-used Wall camera which happened to be the only one available for hire that day." With this, and a group of friends as crew, he began shooting.

Ray's lack of experience was shred by most of his collaborators. All but a few of the actors were non-professionals, and those few had rarely worked in films. The cinematographer, Subrata Mitra, had never shot a film before; Bansi Chandragupta, the art director, had worked only on *The River*, the editor, Dulal Dutta, was a veteran of two films' experience. None of them owned a car and they could rarely afford taxis; the equipment was transported by bus or train to the locations, some of which were sixty miles from Calcutta. Since all of them had regular jobs, filming proceeded on weekends and over vacations. The plan was to shoot enough footage to have something to show potential backers. Some 4,000 feet of film was edited, assembled and shown around but there were still no takers. Ray sold off his precious books and classical records, and Bijoya pawned her jewelry but to no avail. Some eighteen months after filming had started, Ray sadly disbanded his team. There seemed little hope that the picture would ever be completed.

Around this time Monroe Wheeler curator of the Museum Of Modern Art visited Calcutta seeking material for an exhibition of Indian art. He heard about Ray's project, saw some stills and suggested that the film, if finished in time, might form part of his exhibition. Ray was highly gratified but Wheeler could offer no financial support. Six months later John Huston turned up, scouting locations for his Kipling movie, *The Man Who Would be King*, and was shown the edited footage. He was favorably impressed and reported as much to Wheeler.

Meanwhile, through a contact of his mother's, Ray had gained access to the Chief Minister of the West Bengal government, Dr. Roy. News of foreign interest in this eccentric project had filtered through. Roy viewed the footage and agreed

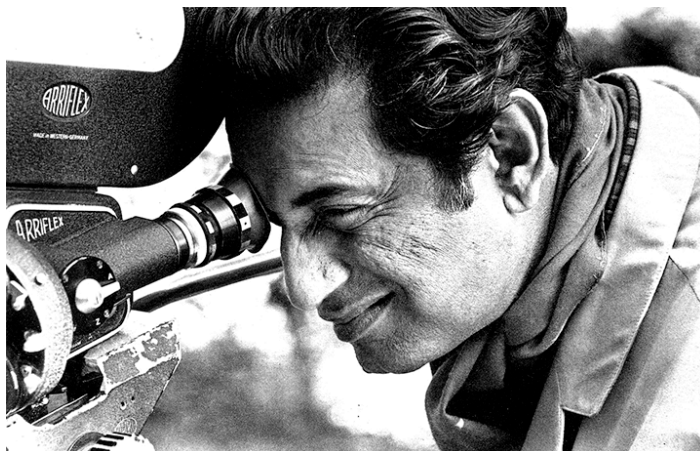
that the state government would purchase the film outright, taking in return any profit accruing from domestic exhibition. (According to some accounts, the funds came from the Department of Roads, who believed, taking the title literally, that Ray was making a documentary about road-building.) With this backing and a six-month leave of absence from Keymer's, Ray was able to resume shooting, now on a full-time basis. Working against time—Ravi Shankar's evocative score was composed in eleven hours—Ray and his team completed the film in time for Wheeler's exhibition in April 1955.

"The cinematic material," Ray wrote later, "dictated a style to me, a very slow, rhythm determined by nature, the landscape, the country. . . . The script had to retain some of the rambling quality of the novel because that in itself contained a clue to the feeling of authenticity: life in a poor Bengali village does ramble." Affectionately, and never condescendingly, *Pather Panchali* offers us a series of events, not seen through Apu's eyes but rather reflected in his wide-eyed, responsive gaze. "Instead of simply identifying with the child's view. "Robin Wood observed, "Ray makes us increasingly sensitive to the child's reactions to what he sees."

As Adib, film critic of *The Times of India*, recognized, something revolutionary had appeared in Indian cinema: "it is banal to compare it with any other Indian picture—for even the best pictures produced so far have been cluttered with clichés. *Pather Panchali* is pure cinema. There is no trace of the theatre in it. . . . The countryside lives in the quiver of every leaf, in every ripple on the surface of the pond, in the daily glory of its mornings and evenings. The people live in every nerve and we live with them. . . . If sequence after sequence fixes itself in the mind of the audience, it is because every scene has been intensely conceived."

With some reluctance, since it was felt to give an adverse impression of India, *Pather Panchali* was chosen as official Indian entry for the 1956 Cannes Festival. Many critics stayed away, convinced by past experience that no Indian film could be worth watching, but almost all who attended the screening hailed the debut of a major new director, and the revelation of an unprecedented maturity in the Indian cinema. (A dissenting voice came from François Truffaut, who walked out after two reels, announcing that the film was "insipid and Europeanized," and that in any case he was not interested in Indian peasants.)

Pather Panchali was awarded the prize as Best Human Document and went on to win a fistful of other awards including the Selznick Golden Laurel at Berlin, and received wide international release. In *Sight and Sound* Lindsay Anderson described it as "a beautiful picture, completely fresh and personal," in which Ray's camera "reaches forward into life, exploring and exposing, with reverence and wonder."



Many critics found *Aparajito* a disappointment after *Pather Panchali*. "The film is neither realistic nor symbolic: it is merely awkward," wrote Eric Rhode. . . . Stanley Kaufmann, on the other hand, who had dismissed *Pather Panchali* as "rewarding if taken as a dramatized documentary," now realized that Ray was "in process of creating a national film epic unlike anything—in size and soul—since [Donskoi's] Maxim trilogy." In *Film* (March-April 1960), Douglas McVay considered it "the most profoundly sensitive panel of the triptych," singling out the moving scene of Sarojaya's lonely death: "Through the gathering dusk, the sick woman glimpses the approach of one more locomotive on the skyline. . . . She stumbles to her feet and gazes eagerly out into the darkness. . . . Only the light of the fireflies twinkles back at her."

Aparajito was awarded numerous prizes, including the Golden Lion at the 1957 Venice Festival. . . .

The theme of change, of the countervailing gains and losses attendant on the forces of progress, has often been identified as the central preoccupation of Ray's films. This theme, underlying much of the Apu trilogy, finds its most overt expression in *Jalsaghar* (*The Music Room*, 1958). The hero, an aging *zamindar* (feudal landlord), lives amid the crumbling grandeur of his vast palace, idly puffing his hookah and watching the last of his ancestral wealth trickle away. Out in the fields a solitary elephant, survivor of a once extensive herd, pads morosely about, intermittently obscured by dust raised by the trucks of the upstart village money lender, whose star has risen as the *zamindar*'s has sunk. Further off, an estuarial river flows sluggishly past mud flats; the very landscape seems gripped by terminal lethargy.

The *zamindar*'s only passion are the *jalsas* (recitals of classical music) held in his music room. When the money lender builds a music room of his own, the old man's pride is aroused. The palace's faded splendors are dusted off, the most expensive dancer is hired, the money lender is invited and, when he attempts to offer financial tribute, publicly snubbed. "That is the host's privilege," the *zamindar* reminds him as, with a fatuous but splendid gesture, he tosses his last few gold coins to the dancer. Next morning he meticulously dons his riding costume, mounts his sole remaining stallion, rides madly towards the river, and is thrown to his death.

John Coleman, writing in the *New Statesman* compared *The Music Room* to the best of Renoir: "It doesn't so much duck taking sides, as animate both of them with an indigenous sympathy." The *zamindar*—played with magisterial torpor by the eminent stage and screen actor Chhabu Biswas—is effete, indolent, patently absurd and yet, in his genuine devotion to music, in the doomed extravagance of his final gesture—perversely magnificent. Ustad Vilyat Khan, whose own family had been generously supported by a *zamindari* household, tended in his score to emphasize the nobler aspects of the protagonist: had Ray composed his own score, as he was later to do, "I would

have given an ironic edge to it...but for him it was all sweetness and greatness.”

Marie Seton maintained that, far from pandering to popular taste by incorporating long musical episodes, Ray “challenged the whole convention of songs and dances in Indian cinema.

Audiences...conditioned to the introduction of songs and dances as entertainment interludes and [as] dramatic and romantic stresses, had never before been confronted with...classical singing and dancing as integral focal points of realistic sequences.” At all events, both critical and public response was puzzled and lukewarm, though the film gained a Presidential Award at New Delhi. (Very few of Ray’s films have won an award of some kind; he must rank among the world’s most honored directors.) Internationally *The Music Room* was more warmly received. John Russell Taylor described it as “one of Ray’s most masterly films, exquisitely photographed and directed with a complete, unquestioning mastery of mood....For those willing to place themselves under its hypnotic spell it offers pleasures of unique delicacy.”...

With the completion of the Apu trilogy, Ray was widely acclaimed as one of the great masters of humanist cinema, comparable with Renoir, Flaherty and de Sica. As far as the rest of the world was concerned he stood as the dominant figure in Indian cinema, sole representative of his country’s vast movie industry. Within India his status was more ambiguous. Although he enjoyed huge prestige as the only Indian director to have achieved international respect, he was also the object of considerable resentment, especially in Bombay; and his work—then as now—was limited to a relatively restricted audience: the intellectual middle classes of the Bengali-speaking minority. (Ray always refused to have his films dubbed into Hindi or other languages)....

Some critics, following Truffaut, have accused Ray of tailoring his films to European tastes, of making—as one of them put it—UNESCO cinema.; Ray has consistently rebutted such attacks (“All my films are made with my own Bengali audience in view”), pointing out that even the most sympathetic western viewer, unless extraordinarily well-versed in Bengali language and culture, will find much in his films alien and incomprehensible.

...One film which Ray thought so esoteric that it would scarcely be worth releasing abroad was *Devi* (*The Goddess*, 1960), a study of religious fanaticism in nineteenth-century rural Bengal.... “Villains bore me,” Ray has remarked.... To Ray’s surprise, foreign audiences were in general highly appreciative of *Devi*, although for a time it seemed they might never have the chance to see it. The film caused widespread controversy in Bengal, being taken in some quarters as an impious attack on Hinduism,

and was initially refused an export license on the grounds that it portrayed India as sunk in primitive superstition. The order for its release is said to have come from Nehru in person....

In all Ray’s films, even *Pather Panchali*, interiors are shot in the studio, although so subtly are the sets constructed and lit that we are rarely aware of artifice.

“Calm without, fire within,” the title of Ray’s essay on the Japanese cinema.

Outside the avant-garde, there is perhaps no filmmaker who exercises such control over his work as Satyajit Ray. Scripting, casting, directing, scoring, operating the camera, working closely on art direction and editing, even designing his own credit titles and publicity material—his films come as close to wholly personal expression as may be possible in mainstream

cinema. Not that his working methods are in the least dictatorial; those who have worked with him pay tribute to his patience, courtesy, and unfailing good temper in the face of all the setbacks and disasters inherent in moviemaking. “I make films for the love of it,” he once wrote. “I enjoy every moment of the filmmaking process,” from the first draft of the scenario to final cut. This enthusiasm is evidently communicated to his collaborators; Ray’s direction, Soumitra Chatterjee told an interviewer, “is inspired, and



it’s an inspiration that is contagious and spreads to the entire crew.” Actors have been known to pass up three lavishly-paid Bombay spectacles to work on one of his low-budget productions.

...Hitherto, all Ray’s films had been based on novels or stories by others, although he had often altered the originals considerably in his scripts—and, especially with *Teen Kanya*, been censured for doing so by literary purists. As he explained, “I don’t have enough experience of life to write about peasants or even nawabs,,,,,My experience is all middle-class and that’s rather a limited field. So I turn to others.” His first original script was for *Kanchanjungha* (1962), which was also his first picture in color.... “Chekhovian,” an epithet often applied to Ray’s work, was used with particular frequency about *Kanchanjungha*, within whose quiet microcosm the social conflicts of a nation are clearly mirrored....

Kanchanjungha was also the first film for which Ray composed his own score. Though he had received no formal musical training, he had grown up in an intensely musical household., acquiring an extensive knowledge of Indian and western classical music.... Finding it increasingly frustrating to work with professional composers, whose ideas often ran contrary to his own, he has since *Kanchanjungha* composed all his own film scores, as well as those for James Ivory’s first two features, *The Householder* and *Shakespeare Wallah*.

From [*Mahanager/The Big City* 1963] on Ray took personal control of yet another filmmaking function, operating the camera himself. “I realized that, working with new actors, they are more confident if they don’t see me, they are less tense. I remain behind the camera. And I see better and can get the exact frame.”

“Ray’s admirers,” Richard Roud observed, “often quarrel as to which are his best films.” Few of them, though, would disagree in placing *Charulata* (*The Lonely Wife*, 1964) among the very finest. Ray himself rates it his favorite: “It’s the one with the fewest flaws.” The script is taken from a novel by Tagore. Madhabi Mukherjee, surpassing her performance in *The Big City*, plays Charulata, wife of a rich, earnest young intellectual in 1879 Calcutta. Bhupati, owner-editor of a liberal political weekly, vaguely aware of his wife’s discontent, invites her brother Umapada and his wife, Mandakini, to stay. Umapada assumes the managership of the journal, but Mandakini, a featherhead chatterbox, is poor company for the graceful, intelligent Charu. Bhupati’s young cousin Amal (Soumitra Chatterjee) arrives for a visit; lively, enthusiastic, an aspiring writer, he establishes an immediate rapport with Charu that slides insensibly toward love. Umapada, meanwhile, plots to embezzle the journal’s funds. Bhupati is shocked less by the financial loss than by the betrayal of his trust, and Amal, conscious that he too was contemplating a betrayal, hastily departs. Belatedly, from Charu’s irrepressible grief, Bhupati realizes what has been happening and rushes from the house. He later returns and the film ends on a freeze: Bhupati and Charu’s hands, extended but not meeting. Reconciliation may come, but only with time and difficulty.

In all Ray’s films, even *Pather Panchali*, interiors are shot in the studio, although so subtly are the sets constructed and lit that we are rarely aware of artifice. *Charulata* includes few exterior scenes; almost all the action takes place in the heavy, claustrophobic setting of Bhupati’s Victorian-Bengali house. As always, Ray worked closely with Bansi Chandragupta, providing him with an exact layout of the rooms and detailed sketches of the main set-ups, and accompanying him on trips to the bazaars to find suitable furniture and decorations. The result feels wholly authentic, evoking an exact sense of period, of a class who ordered their lives by (as Penelope Houston put it) “a conscious compromise between eastern grace and western decorum.”

“Calm without, fire within,” the title of Ray’s essay on Japanese cinema, could well describe *Charulata*. The emotional turbulence is conveyed in hints and sidelong gestures, in an involuntary glance or a snatch of a song, often betraying feelings only half recognized by the person experiencing them. (To a western audience, all three members of the triangle might seem impossibly naïve. This would be a cultural misapprehension: in Bengali society, a playfully flirtatious relationship—“sweet but chaste”—between a wife and her husband’s younger brother or cousin is normal, and indeed encouraged. Charu and Amal simply slip, unknowingly, across an ill-defined social border.) The theme of pent-up emotions trembling on the verge of open expression is skillfully counterpointed both on the political level—Bhupati sees in a Liberal victory at Westminster the portent of a greater self-determination for his people—and in the physical situation of Charulata herself, a gifted woman striving toward emancipation, trapped in the stuffy brocade-lined cage of her house. In the opening sequence we see her, opera glass in hand, darting birdlike from window to slatted window, following

the movements of passersby in the street. When Bhupati wanders past, too engrossed in a book to notice her, she turns her glasses on him as well—another strange specimen from the intriguing outside world. Later, in a sunlit garden, Amal lies prone on his stomach writing busily, while Charu swings herself higher and higher, rapt in the ecstasy of her newfound intellectual and erotic stimulation. Ray, as Robin Wood observed, “is one of the cinema’s great masters of interrelatedness.”...

Outside the avant-garde, there is perhaps no filmmaker who exercises such total control over his work as Satyajit Ray. Scripting, casting, directing, scoring, operating the camera, working closely on art direction and editing, even designing his own credit titles and publicity material—his films come as close to wholly personal expression as may be possible in mainstream cinema. Not that his working methods are in the least dictatorial; those who have worked with him pay tribute to his patience, courtesy, and unflinching good temper in the face of all the setbacks and disasters inherent in moviemaking. “I make films for the love of it,” he once wrote. “I enjoy every minute of the filmmaking process,” from the first draft of the scenario to the final cut....

“I have not often been praised or blamed for the right reasons,” Ray has remarked. One surprisingly persistent view of him, apparently based on *Pather Panchali* and not much else, is as the gifted natural, an untutored primitive of the cinema, adept at semidocumentary studies of simple peasant life but sadly out of his depth with more sophisticated subjects. ...Most critics, though, would more likely concur with Penelope Houston’s assessment of him as “obviously a highly sophisticated artist. Like Renoir he looks, and looks, and looks again; builds his films through painstaking observation; assists his players...to act with that suggestion of unforced naturalism which looks spontaneous and means hours of the most concentrated patience. Ray is no peasant, and the limpid clarity of his style is not achieved by luck or chance.”

Allegations of the “un-Indianness” of Ray’s films often seem to stem mainly from their wide appeal to foreign audiences—an argument rarely used to adduce a lack of national character in the films if, say, Fellini or Bergman....

He succeeded in making Indian cinema, for the first time in its history, something to be taken seriously, and he presented his fellow Indian filmmakers with an unprecedented opportunity to make worthwhile pictures. He has also created a body of work which, for richness and range, will stand comparison with that of any other director. At their finest—in *Charulata*, *Days and Nights in the Forest*, *The Middleman*—Ray’s films move to their own inner rhythm, individual and wholly satisfying, full of warmth, humor and a constant sense of discovery.

from *Conversations with The Great Moviemakers of Hollywood’s Golden Age*. Ed. George Stevens Jr. Alfred A Knopf NY 2006

Satyajit Ray

“First it’s finding a story which excites you. Second, it’s converting it into the terms of a screenplay. Third, it’s casting,

which I do myself. People just come to my house. There's a knock on the door, and there's somebody waiting outside with acting ambitions."

"I try to pack my films with meaning and psychological inflections and shades," he said, "and make a whole which will communicate a lot of things to many people." Ray's cinema flows with the serenity and nobility of a big river," said Akira Kurosawa. "People are born, live out their lives and then accept their deaths. There is nothing irrelevant or haphazard in his cinematographic technique."

April 13, 1978 *You have been making films for more than twenty years. The subjects have varied widely—the rural poor, commercial urban life, the British presence—but all the films have been set in India. Do you have any interest in directing outside your country?*

Not really. I have turned down many offers from here, though wouldn't mind working with American actors. In fact, I came to Hollywood about ten years ago for a project that would have been filmed in Bengal and that needed an American actor. But I wouldn't want to work outside of India. I feel very deeply rooted there. I know my people better than any other. I would like to narrow it down even further and say, things Bengali, because I think of India as a continent, and every state has its own topography, language and culture. There is an underlying link of Hinduism perhaps, but on the surface the states are very different. You can move from the Himalayas to a desert.

You've acknowledged Jean Renoir as one of your earliest influences. How did that come about?

In the forties, I saw the American films of Jean Renoir. The first one was *The Southerner*. Eventually I saw *The Diary of a Chambermaid* and a few others. I also read about his French work, and I was familiar with his father's paintings. Then, in 1949, Renoir came to Calcutta to look for locations for *The River*. ...I just went and presented myself as a student of the cinema. I got to know him quite well. He was comparatively free in the evenings and I would often just drop in. Later I accompanied him on his location hunts because I knew the countryside quite well....

He talked about the difficulties he had had in Hollywood trying to convince people that the film ought to be shot on location and not in the studio. He dropped occasional remarks which I found very illuminating. For instance, he said that a film does not have to show many things, but the few that it shows have to have the right kind of details. He kept insisting on details and the value of details in films. We would drive through the countryside, and he would say, "Look at that!" and point to a

clump of bananas or plantains. "That is Bengal. That little palm, that is quintessential Bengal for me." He was always trying to find in the landscape details that he felt were characteristic of the place and that he was eventually hoping to use in the film. That left an impression, because I myself was very interested in details. ...

Has censorship affected your films?

Not to a very serious extent, because I have always been oblique in my statements, even on human relationships. In any case, we can't afford to be too permissive. And I'm not particularly anxious to be too permissive, because I think there has to be some room left for suggestion and obliqueness. In the cinema there is, I believe, a strong political censorship of violence. There's a lot of fighting in the new commercial cinema, but there's no blood shown. Apparently you are free to show a lot of bashing about. But if you show catsup, then you are in for it....

What form do your scripts take?

My scripts are in visual form. They are not written documents which can be duplicated and passed out to the members of the crew. They're just little framed sketches with directions down the right-hand side, and little notes on dialogue and camera movements. I don't think it's a literary medium anyway, so why waste work? It's only when the question of publication comes that you have

to devise a part-novel, part-drama form. But I've never wasted time in being literary.

What led to your approach?

Well, I was trained as a painter; I did illustrations. But I'm not the only one who works this way. I once saw a script by Kurosawa which looks exactly like mine. I know of some other directors who use a visual form.

Music seems to have a special importance in your films. What do you see as its use?

I've been using less and less music in my films of late because I've always had the feeling that background music was one element that was not part of pure cinema. It was an admission of inadequacy on the part of the screenplay writer—or the director, perhaps—to have to use music to underline certain things. Perhaps it was out of a lack of confidence in the audience. Of course, I was quite surprised to see some of the American films of the thirties, for example, *Scarface*, which had no music at all. It's later—late thirties and early forties—that music really came into its own. Then you had big composers like Max Steiner and Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Alfred Newman writing symphonic scores which run right through the film almost. I find that those are the films which have dated most now.



I personally prefer a slightly drier approach, but I realize that one cannot do without music. In the trilogy I did not write my own music. I used Ravi Shankar, as you probably know. The film without the music would have seemed slower, I'm afraid. I think what music does is to provide the audience with something to react to so that they are kept occupied. At least their ears are kept occupied. With that, there is something happening.

What do you think about using music as counterpoint?

Yes, fine. That's one of the recommended uses, certainly. Kubrick has done that in his films, using "The Blue Danube" for *2001: A Space Odyssey*. I think it's better to do it that way, because the other way would be totally logical. It would be saying the same thing in terms of music as is being expressed in rhetorical terms. In any case, I don't like the Mickey Mousing of music by providing songs with every action. That's very bad.

I watch my films with the audiences. Certainly on the opening night, but I also go just to see how the audience is reacting. I've often found that the audience's reaction in a way changes the film for me. Often, during the passages which have very little dialogue, or just subtle things on the soundtrack, and no music, I felt terrified. I wanted to walk out of the theater. I would think, now why didn't I use music here, which would pacify the public who are being restive and fidgety? It remains a very acute problem, I think, whether to use music or not. I would ideally not like to use music at all. I certainly do not approve of well-known pieces of classical music used in the background. What happens is that the film is rarely able to come up to the level of the music. What really happens is that the music is brought down to the level of the film, which is upsetting.

How did you work with Ravi Shankar on the Apu trilogy?

Shankar was then already a very famous concert virtuoso who was constantly touring, if not outside of India, then inside India. For *Pather Panchali* he was available for just a day. I was able to show him half the film in rough cut. The music I wouldn't say was composed, because there was nothing written down. He just hummed and whistled, and the musicians just performed. All the music was done in a single session. This is not the best way of doing it, mind you. I got worried, and I had him play three-minute and four-minute pieces and various ragas in various tempos. Either a solo sitar or a combination with the flute, with drums, whatever. But a lot of the work was done in the cutting room. There was considerable wrestling with the music and the images.

...Music has always been my first love....

You operate your own camera?

I've been doing so for the last fifteen years. Not that I have no trust in my cameraman's operational abilities, but the best position to judge the acting from is through the lens. Also, I've noticed working with nonprofessionals, that they are happier if they don't see my face while I'm directing....

Do you have a philosophy that you care to articulate?

It's there in my films. I'm afraid I can't be articulate about it. I'm very bad at verbalizations. That's why I'm not a writer; I'm a filmmaker. I'm afraid you will have to draw your own conclusions.

Matinee Idylls: Reflections on the Movies. Richard Schickel.



Ivan R. Dee. Chicago, 1999. "Satyajit Ray: Days and Nights in the Art Houses"

I had been assigned to produce the film tribute to the greatest of "Indian Chappies," Satyajit Ray, for the 1992 Academy Award broadcast, on which he was to receive an honorary Oscar....When I began telling people what I was working on, I discovered that it was only among my contemporaries—and, of course, the critics and film historians—that Ray was a recognizable name. And then only as a figure from our past. They, no more than I, had any sense of the size and strength of his body of work as it has developed in the last two decades or so. As for younger people, they had quite simply never heard of him.

This was a shock to me. But not as great as the dismay that came over me as I tried to get to work on my little montage, which instantly turned into the worst logistical nightmare I have ever endured in over two decades of making compilation films.

As far as I could determine, no American company held television rights (and therefore a viable print or tape) of any of Ray's films. For that matter, I could turn up no one who held American theatrical rights in any of his pictures. There were a few scattered, battered 16mm prints of his films available in the audiovisual market, but most of them were near-unwatchable....To put the point simply, there was simply no market for Ray's films in the United States, therefore no impetus to keep good copies of his work available for public exhibition....

Advised not to bother with Indian sources because in a poor nation film preservation is not a high priority and the state film bureaucracy is mysterious and impenetrable, I finally turned to Britain. There, at last, I was able to obtain air-worthy prints. The reason for that, I believe, is simple and exemplary: it is because the National Film Theatre and the British Film Institute created and continue to sustain a small but commercially viable audience for movies that are not made in America and are not comedies or action films aimed at the only audience that seems to count these days—young, brain-damaged males.

The previous year Channel 4 in Britain had presented—in prime time, mind you—a retrospective that included almost all of Ray's best work....

As I learned a few years ago, when I taught a criticism course at the USC film school, young people today, even when they would like to, cannot replicate the experience [of seeing

many foreign films] the fifties generation enjoyed....Today's young people cannot gain convenient (or even inconvenient) access to their film heritage or to cinematic cosmopolitanism.

...Working with Ray's work in some measure reanimated something like my youthful idealism about the movies and about the utility of the critical gesture, not as a way of passing ultimate judgments but as a way of stirring interest in, discussion of, yes, even passion for the movies in their infinite, and in this case, marvelously exotic variety.

I said earlier that coming upon the Apu trilogy anew I was struck by the lasting power of its quite simple imagery. But there were other things I could see about it now that were hidden from me thirty-five years ago. Viewing the three films back to back I was struck by their cumulative power. In everything but physical scale they constitute an epic. They range over two decades and embrace both village and city life in modern India and all of the most basic human emotions in the most tender and patient way. More important, I was now able to see that the films—especially the final one, *The World of Apu*—hinted at what I can now see as Satyajit Ray's great if always indirectly spoken theme.

That is the ineffectuality of the male in a colonial and postcolonial society....This is a major body of work, embracing more than thirty gracefully executed films, the overriding theme of which—the psychological and cultural devastation of a society only recently released from colonialism—is not without interest even to those people who are uninterested in the cinema as such. What matters even more to me is that its felicities—there are no crude villains in Ray's work, no caricatured exploiters of the people (or heroes of the people either)—and its subtle wisdom are unavailable to us in our present, devastated cultural climate. I wish I knew what to do about this situation, beyond protesting it.

Philip Kemp: "*Charulata*: 'Calm Without, Fire Within'" (Criterion notes)

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), poet, playwright, novelist, philosopher, composer, painter, and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, was the towering figure of the Bengali Renaissance. Among his lasting achievements was the founding in 1921 of his "world university," Visva-Bharati, at Santiniketan, some 120 miles north of Kolkata. In 1940, the nineteen-year-old Satyajit Ray enrolled there to study arts.

Ray's father, Sukumar—who died when his son was two—had been a close friend of Tagore's. But by the time Ray arrived at Santiniketan, the Nobel Laureate had only a year to live, and the young student saw little of him, feeling daunted by his venerable status. Nonetheless, Ray always retained a deep regard for Tagore's work, and when, in 1948, he was planning a career in the cinema, he collaborated with a friend on a screen adaptation of one of Tagore's novels, *Ghare baire* (*The Home and the World*). The project fell through, and some years later, rereading the script, Ray found it "an amateurish, Hollywoodish effort which would have ruined our reputation and put an end to whatever thoughts I might have had about a film career." (Ray eventually did film the novel, from a totally new script, in 1984.)

In 1961, now internationally established as a director, with *The Apu Trilogy*, *The Music Room* (1958), and *Devi* (1960) to his credit, Ray returned to Tagore, filming three of his stories as *Three Daughters* (*Teen kanya*) and a documentary, *Rabindranath Tagore*, to celebrate the centenary of the great man's birth. Ray described the latter film, an official tribute to India's national poet, as "a backbreaking chore." But there wasn't the least sense of a chore about Ray's next engagement with Tagore's work.

Charulata (1964), often rated the director's finest film—and the one that, when pressed, he would name as his own personal favorite: "It's the one with the fewest flaws"—is adapted from Tagore's 1901 novella *Nastanirh* (*The Broken Nest*). It's widely believed that the story was inspired by Tagore's relationship with his sister-in-law, Kadambari Devi, who committed suicide in 1884 for reasons that have never been fully explained. Kadambari, like Charulata, was beautiful, intelligent, and a gifted writer, and toward the end of his life, Tagore admitted that the hundreds of haunting portraits of women that he painted in his later years were inspired by memories of her.

Right from the outset of his career, with *Pather panchali* (1955), Ray had shown himself to be exceptionally skilled at conveying a whole world within a microcosm, focusing in on a small social group while still relating it to the wider picture. Virtually all of his finest films—*The Apu Trilogy*, *The Music Room*, *Days and Nights in the Forest* (1969), *Distant Thunder* (1973), *The Middleman* (1975)—achieve this double perspective. But of all his chamber dramas, *Charulata* is perhaps the subtlest and most delicate. The setting, as with so many of Ray's movies, is his native Kolkata. It's around 1880, and the intellectual ferment of the Bengali Renaissance is at its height. Among the educated middle classes, there's talk of self-determination for India within the British Empire—perhaps even complete independence. Such ideas are often aired in the *Sentinel*, the liberal English-language weekly of which Bhupatinath Dutta (Shailen Mukherjee) is the owner and editor. A kindly man, but distracted by his all-absorbing political interests, he largely leaves his wife, the graceful and intelligent Charulata (Madhabi Mukherjee), to her own resources.

The visual elegance and fluidity that Ray achieves in *Charulata* are immediately evident in the long, all-but-wordless sequence that follows the credits and shows us Charu, trapped in the stuffy, brocaded cage of her house, trying to amuse herself. (At this period, no respectable middle-class Bengali wife could venture out into the city alone.) Having called to the servant to take Bhupati his tea, she leafs through a book lying on the bed, discards it, selects another from the bookshelf—then, hearing noises outside in the street, finds her opera glasses and flits birdlike from window to window, watching the passersby. A street musician with his monkey, a chanting group of porters trotting with a palanquin, a portly Brahman with his black umbrella, signifier of his dignified status—all these come under her scrutiny. When Bhupati wanders past, barely a couple of feet away but too engrossed in a book to notice her, she turns her glasses on him as well—just another strange specimen from the intriguing, unattainable outside world.

Throughout this sequence, Ray's camera unobtrusively follows Charu as she roams restlessly around the house, framing and reframing her in a series of spaces—doorways, corridors, pillared galleries—that emphasize both the Victorian-Bengali luxury of her surroundings and her confinement within them. Though subjective shots are largely reserved for Charu's glimpses of street life, the tracking shots that mirror her progress along the gallery, or move in behind her shoulder as she glides from window to window, likewise give us the sense of sharing her comfortable but trammelled life. The only deviation from this pattern comes after she's retrieved the opera glasses. A fast lateral track keeps the glasses in close-up as she holds them by her side and hurries back to the windows, the camera sharing her impulsive eagerness.

Under the credits, we've seen Charu embroidering a wreathed *B* on a handkerchief as a gift for her husband. When she presents it to him, Bhupati is delighted but asks, "When do you find the time, Charu?" Evidently, it's never occurred to him that she might feel herself at a loose end. But now, becoming vaguely aware of Charu's discontent and fearing she may be lonely, he invites her ne'er-do-well brother Umapada and his wife, Mandakini, to stay, offering Umapada employment as manager of the *Sentinel's* finances. Manda, a featherheaded chatterbox, proves poor company for her sister-in-law. Then Bhupati's young cousin Amal (Soumitra Chatterjee) unexpectedly arrives for a visit. Lively, enthusiastic, cultured, an aspiring writer, he establishes an immediate rapport with Charu that on both sides drifts insensibly toward love.

"Calm Without, Fire Within," the title of Ray's essay on the Japanese cinema, could apply equally well to *Charulata* (as the Bengali critic Chidananda Das Gupta has noted). The emotional turbulence that underlies the film is conveyed in hints and sidelong gestures, in a fleeting glance or a snatch of song, often betraying feelings only half recognized by the person experiencing them. In a key scene set in the sunlit garden (with more than a nod to Fragonard), Amal lies on his back on a mat, seeking inspiration, while Charu swings herself high above him, reveling in the ecstasy of her newfound intellectual and erotic stimulation. Ray, as the critic Robin Wood observed, "is one of the cinema's great masters of interrelatedness." This garden scene, which runs some ten minutes, finds Ray at his most intimately lyrical. It's the first time the action has escaped from the house, and the sense of freedom and release is infectious. From internal evidence, it's clear that the scene involves more than one occasion (Charu promises Amal a personally designed notebook for his writings, she presents it to him, he declares that he's filled it), but it's cut together to give the impression of a single, continuous event, a seamless emotional crescendo. Two moments in particular attain a level of rapt intensity rarely equaled in Ray's work, both underscored by

music. The first is when Charu, having just exhorted Amal to write, swings back and forth, singing softly; Ray's camera swings with her, holding her face in close-up, for nearly a minute. Then, when Amal finds inspiration, we get a montage of the Bengali writing filling his notebook, line superimposed upon line in a series of cross-fades, while sitar and *shehnai* gently hail his creativity.

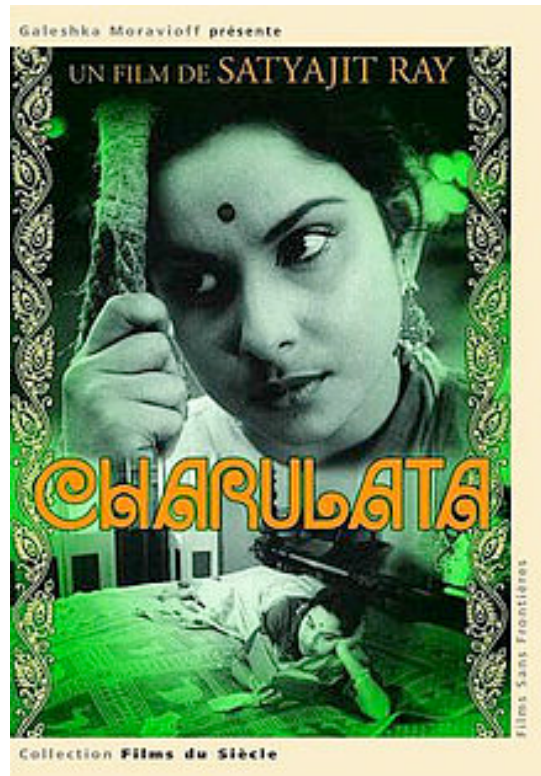
In an article in *Sight & Sound* in 1982, Ray suggested that, to Western audiences, *Charulata*, with its triangle plot and Europeanized, Victorian ambience, might seem familiar territory, but that "beneath the veneer of familiarity, the film is chockablock with details to which [the Western viewer] has no access. Snatches of song, literary allusions, domestic details, an entire scene where Charu and her beloved Amal talk in alliterations . . . all give the film a density missed by the Western viewer in his preoccupation with plot, character, the moral and philosophical aspects of the story, and the apparent meaning of the images."

Among the details that might elude the average Western viewer are the recurrent allusions to the nineteenth-century novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838–94). A key figure of Bengali literature in the generation before Tagore, Bankim Chandra (sometimes referred to as "the Scott of

Bengal") wrote a series of romantic, nationalistic novels and actively fostered the young Tagore's career. In the opening sequence, it's one of Bankim Chandra's novels that Charu takes down from the bookshelf, while singing his name to herself; and when, not long afterward, Amal makes his dramatic first entry, arriving damp-haired and windblown on the wings of a summer storm, he's declaiming a well-known line of the writer's. The coincidence points up the affinity between them; by contrast, when Bhupati recalls incredulously that a friend couldn't sleep for three nights after reading a Bankim Chandra novel ("I told him, 'You must be crazy!'"), it emphasizes the empathetic gulf between him and his wife.

Music, too, is used to express underlying sympathies: Both Charu and Amal are given to breaking spontaneously into song, and two of Tagore's compositions act as leitmotifs. We hear the tune of one of them, "Mama cite" ("Who dances in my heart?"), played over the opening images, and Amal sings another, "Phule phule" ("Every bud and every blossom sways and nods in the gentle breeze"), that Charu later takes up in the garden scene as they grow ever closer emotionally. (Manda, who has observed the pair together in the garden, afterward slyly sings a line of this song to Amal.) Ray weaves variations on both songs into his score. Another that Amal sings for Charu was composed by Tagore's older brother Jyotirindranath, the husband of Kadambari Devi.

The film's underlying theme of pent-up emotions trembling on the verge of expression is counterpointed both on a political level—Bhupati and his friends see in the Liberal victory



at Westminster in April 1880 the chance of greater self-determination for India—and in the situation of Charulata herself, a gifted, sensitive woman yearning toward emancipation but slipping unconsciously toward a betrayal of her husband. To Western eyes, all three members of the triangle might seem willfully obtuse or impossibly naive. This again would be a misapprehension born of unfamiliarity with Bengali society, where, as Ray pointed out, a husband's younger brother—in this case, a close cousin, which is much the same in Bengali custom and terms—is traditionally entitled to a privileged relationship with his sister-in-law. This relationship, playfully flirtatious, “sweet but chaste,” between a wife and her debar, is accepted and even encouraged. Charu and Amal simply stray, half unknowingly, across an ill-defined social border.

Ray was always known as a skilled and sympathetic director of actors. Saeed Jaffrey, who starred in *The Chess Players* (1977), bracketed him and John Huston as “gardener directors, who have selected the flowers, know exactly how much light and sun and water the flowers need, and then let them grow.” Soumitra Chatterjee, who made his screen debut when Ray cast him in the title role of the third film of *The Apu Trilogy*, *The World of Apu* (1959), gives perhaps the finest of his fifteen performances in Ray's films as Amal—young, impulsive, a touch ridiculous in his irrepressible showing off, bursting with the joy of exploring life in its fullness after his release from the drab confines of a student hostel. He's superbly matched by the graceful Madhabi Mukherjee as Charu, her expressive features alive with the ever-changing play of unaccustomed emotions that she scarcely knows how to identify, let alone deal with. She had starred in Ray's previous film, *The Big City* (1963); he described her as “a wonderfully sensitive actress who made my work very easy for me.”

The other three main actors had also appeared in *The Big City*, though in minor roles. Shailen Mukherjee, playing Bhupati, was principally a stage actor; this was his first major screen role. Despite his professed inexperience (Ray recalled him saying, “Manikda [Ray's nickname], I know nothing about film acting. I'll be your pupil, you teach me”), he succeeds in making Bhupati a thoroughly likable if remote figure, well-intentioned but far too idealistic and trusting for his own good. Gitali Roy's occasional veiled glances hint that Mandakini isn't, perhaps, quite as empty-headed as Charu supposes; she certainly isn't above flirting with Amal on her own account. As her husband, Umapada, Shyamal Ghosal expresses with his whole body language his envy and resentment of Bhupati—signals that his brother-in-law of course completely fails to pick up on.

Ray rarely used locations for interiors, preferring whenever possible to create them in the studio, though so subtly are the sets constructed and lit that we're rarely aware of the

artifice. *Charulata* includes few exterior scenes; almost all the action takes place in the lavishly furnished setting of Bhupati's house. As always, Ray worked closely with his regular art director, Bansi Chandragupta, providing him with an exact layout of the rooms and detailed sketches of the main setups, and accompanying him on trips to the bazaars to find suitable furniture, decorations, and props. The result feels convincingly authentic, evoking a strong sense of period and of a class that ordered their lives, as critic Penelope Houston has put it, by “a conscious compromise between Eastern grace and Western decorum.”

Though he readily acknowledged the contributions of his collaborators, Ray came as close as any director within mainstream cinema to being a complete auteur. Besides scripting, storyboarding, casting, and directing his films, he composed the scores (from *Three Daughters* on) and even designed the credit titles and publicity posters. Starting with *Charulata*, he took control of yet another filmmaking function by operating his own camera. “I realized,” he explained, “that working with new actors, they are more confident if they don't see me; they are less tense. I remain behind the camera. And I see better and get the exact frame.”

Charulata was the best received of all Ray's films to date, both in Bengal and abroad. In Bengal, it was generally agreed that he had done full justice to the revered Tagore—even if some people still harbored reservations about the implicitly adulterous subject matter. After seeing the film at the 1965 Berlin Film Festival, where it won the Silver Bear for best director, Richard Roud noted that it was “distinguished by a degree of technical invention that one hasn't encountered before in Ray's films,” but that “all the same, it is not for his technique that one admires Ray so much: no enumeration of gems of mise-en-scène would convey the richness of characterization and that breathless grace and radiance he manages to draw from his actors.”

From its lyrical high point in the garden scene, the mood of *Charulata* gradually if imperceptibly darkens, moving toward emotional conflict and, eventually, desolation—a process reflected in the restriction of camera movement and in the lighting, which grows more shadowy and somber as Bhupati sees his trust betrayed and Charu realizes what she's lost. Inspired, as he readily admitted, by the final shot of Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*, Ray ends the film on a freeze-frame—or rather, a series of freeze-frames. Two hands, Charu's and Bhupati's, reaching tentatively out to each other, close but not yet joined. Ray's *tanpura* score rises in a plangent crescendo. On the screen appears the title of Tagore's story: “The Broken Nest.” Irretrievably broken? Ray, subtle and unprescriptive as ever, leaves that for us to decide.

COMING UP IN THE SPRING 2014 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS SERIES 28:

- February 25 Metin Erksan, *Dry Summer*, 1964, 90 min
 March 4 Monte Hellman, *Two-Lane Blacktop*, 1971, 103 min
 March 11 John Cassavetes, *Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, 1976, 135 min
 Spring break March 17-22
 March 25 Agnes Varda, *Vagabond*, 1985, 105 min
 April 1 Gabriell Axel, *Babette's Feast*, 1987, 104min
 April 8 Louis Malle, *Vanya on 42nd Street*, 1994, 119 min
 April 15 Wes Anderson, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, 2001, 110 min
 April 22 Tommy Lee Jones, *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*, 2005, 120 min
 April 29 José Padilha, *Elite Squad*, 2007, 115 min
 May 6 John Huston, *The Dead*, 1987 83 min

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 The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the Market Arcade Film & Arts Center
 and State University of New York at Buffalo
 with support from the Robert and Patricia Colby Foundation and the Buffalo News

an interesting event coming up at Squeaky Wheel:

Little Red Booking presents...

Who/What: *A Field in England* Film Screening

Where: Squeaky Wheel Buffalo Media Resources (712 Main St, Buffalo 14202)

When: Thursday, February 20th, 2014

Start Time: 7pm

End Time: 9pm

Cost: \$7

Contact: Jake Mikler phone: 716-381-7261 email: jake.mikler@gmail.com

Link to Facebook event invitation: https://www.facebook.com/events/602812353100226/?ref_newsfeed_story_type=regular

Ben Wheatley is one of the most promising and original new filmmakers, not only in the UK but also in contemporary cinema. Wheatley's filmography charts a reassessment of genre films and an array of styles: kitchen sink realism via a crime family chronicle in *Down Terrace* (2009), the hit man down the rabbit hole in *Kill List* (2011), a pitch black buddy comedy in *Sightseers* (2012), and culminating into stranger territory with his newest film, *A Field in England* (2013).

The film has all the workings of a future midnight movie favorite and can be fittingly described as a 17th century acid trip. The film is a historical thriller with elements of 1960s psychedelia, spiked with occult mysticism and cryptic hallucinations. The film is influenced by arthouse and cult films from the sixties and seventies, particularly Peter Watkins' *Culloden* and *Witchfinder General* by Michael Reeves, to name a few.

"During the Civil War in 17th-Century England, a small group of deserters flee from a raging battle through an overgrown field. They are captured by an alchemist (Michael Smiley), who forces the group to aid him in his search to find a hidden treasure that he believes is buried in the field. Crossing a vast mushroom circle, which provides their first meal, the group quickly descend into a chaos of arguments, fighting and paranoia, and, as it becomes clear that the treasure might be something other than gold, they slowly become victim to the terrifying energies trapped inside the field." -Drafthouse Films

Directed by Ben Wheatley (2013, 91 mins)