



Indian Council for Cultural Relations  
Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre  
High Commission of India, Colombo

# Sanskarikā

Newsletter of the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre

APRIL 2024



Happy Sinhala  
& Tamil New Year

# RAY

## the Filmmaker Extraordinaire



There are some people who are exceptional not just because they are different but because they are never satisfied with their own achievements. Satyajit Ray, the filmmaker from West Bengal, was a towering personality in more senses than one. He was so committed (1991) for his remarkable body of work. He has won major awards at several international film festivals, including Venice and Berlin besides being honoured at Cannes in recognition for his nomination as one of the 10 best directors in the world in 1982.

Apart from his filmmaking skills, he was a screenwriter, an

operative cameraman, a music composer and a designer. He was, also, an author of incredible popularity, a translator of poetry, a lyricist, a musician and an expert at typography! It is quite difficult to categorise Ray as a filmmaker as he is one director who has dealt with a variety of subjects in different styles. Belonging to a family of artistically-inclined legends, his ancestral tapestry is fascinating to say the least. His grandfather Upendrakishore Roychowdhury was a lyricist, printer, author and painter, and his father Sukumar Ray was an iconic poet with a penchant for 'nonsense verse'. Satyajit Ray's



*An archival image of Satyajit Ray*

epoch-making film, *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* or *The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha* (1968) is based on his grandfather's nuanced story of two village nitwits turning into magnificent musicians with the help of a wish granted by *bhuter raja* (king of ghosts).

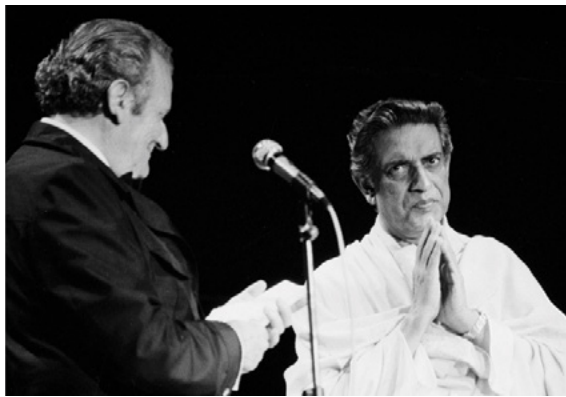
Ray was educated at Presidency College (present-day Presidency University), Calcutta. Bengali author Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay aided by the ever-curious cinematographer Subrata Mitra, who was honoured with a National Film Award in 1986.

In fact, the Apu trilogy comprising *Pather Panchali* (1955), *Aparajito* or *The Unvanquished* (1956) and *Apur*

*Sansar* or *The World of Apu* (1959) is replete with exquisite visual exploration, brutally-stark realism, shades of lyricism and even faintly mystic strains. Visuals of trains, rural Bengal, the majesty of the city of Benaras, the dichotomies of the developing metropolis of erstwhile Calcutta, contemporary art in the trilogy. Ray drew from the brilliant writings of Bandopadhyay in the Apu trilogy and, later, again in *Ashani Sanket* or *Distant Thunder* (1973). Not just Bandopadhyay's works, Ray made engaging cinematic adaptations of *Jalsaghar* or *The Music Room* (1958) written by Charulata or *The Lonely Wife* (1964), gliding hand-held as in *Jana Aranya* or *The Middleman* (1975) or locked in



*Noted British film director Lindsay Anderson (extreme left), renowned Japanese film producer Madame Kawakita (centre) and Satyajit Ray at a reception hosted by the Indian Documentary Producers' Association at the Third International Film Festival in New Delhi in 1965*



*Ray at the opening night of the Cannes Film Festival on May 15, 1982, France*



*Left: Ray received the Golden Lion, the highest award accorded to a film at the Venice Film Festival, for his film Aparajito, on September 9, 1957; Right: An archival image of Ray at his home in Kolkata*



near-melodramatic close-ups as in *Ashani Sanket*, serves nothing less than a tool for sociological analysis, probing into the milieu and making revelations regarding the zeitgeist.

Satyajit Ray has an urban quadrilogy too – *Aranyer Din Ratri* or *Days and Nights in the Forest* (1969), *Pratidwandi*, *Seemabaddha* or *Company Limited* (1971) and *Jana Aranya* – that is also a postmodern exploration into formal narrativity and *mise-en-scene*. The filmmaker was able to bring out the turbulent nature of the 1970s with the restlessness of urban youth and the shadow of urban unemployment looming large. However, not all of Ray's cinematic works were adaptations. Ray has also written original screenplays like *Kanchenjunga* (1962), *Nayak* or *The Hero* (1966), *Agantuk* or *The Stranger* (1991) and *Shakha Proshakha* or *Branches of a Tree* (1990) along with books on the

art of cinema, namely *Bishoy Challachitra* (Subject Cinema), *Our Films, Their Films* and *Ekei Bole Shooting* (This is Called Shooting).

The first of these – *Kanchenjunga* – deserves special mention as it uses the famous Greek cinematic construct of 'unity of time' to express a quasi-existential theme. Moreover, this film, quite ahead of its time, succeeds in probing the mindset of a bourgeois family while resting, often enough, on somewhat subaltern characters and some free spirits. Ray is in the mould of noted Swedish director Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957) but the influence of Academy Award-winning Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini is palpable in the dreams, one of which may seem a trifle literal but visually and orally is quite breathtaking. Legendary Bengali actor Utpal Dutt, painter, author, music composer, film director, cinematographer and creator of fonts (like Ray-Roman),

he never went overboard; he never allowed any one of his personae to subsume any of the others. He had a wonderful sense of humour, perhaps inherited from his father, and his dialogues have always been exemplary. Finally, if there is one quality that sets Ray apart, it is not his numerous international awards (including his back-to-back Silver Bears at Berlin in 1964 and 1965) but his music. In his cinematography and editing, his narrativity and his dialogue, there is an inherent musicality, which is close to divine!

This quality of tunefulness is quite abstract; it is a product of Ray's meticulous organisation. Right from the design of the sequence, there is a noticeable and unique pang and forecasts Charu's volatile propinquity to Amal; Bhupati's (Charu's husband) perusing of the *le shock*, wanders about in a phaeton (an open four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage). When he

returns, in a scene fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity, Charu, with fear and guilt writ large on her countenance, gestures to him to come inside. Bhupati enters but Ray freezes the moment even before Charu's and Bhupati's hands can meet, thus symbolising "the broken nest".

Words are insufficient to express the aesthetic pa with supernatural elements). Ray's stories and his characters are equally popular in Bangladesh too. In fact, Ray's ancestral house is located in the Masua village of Bangladesh's Mymensingh district. Last year, the Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI), decided to initiate an international campaign for the restoration of this iconic landmark. Ray was, without a shadow of doubt, a true renaissance personality. He was multifaceted but never averse to learning something new. Plus, his meticulous eye for classical artistic personality. In the tradition of Tagore, Ray ventured wide but never lost sight of his roots.



**AUTHOR : Ashoke Viswanathan**

*Ashoke Viswanathan is a national and international award-winning filmmaker who is currently professor and Dean at Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute (SRFTI), Kolkata.*

Source: India Perspectives Issue 02, 2021

# EVENTS CALENDAR – APRIL 2024

We Conduct

**CLASSES** on

**Bharatha Natyam, Kathak,  
Sitar, Violin, Tabla,  
Carnatic Vocal, Hindustani  
Vocal, Yoga  
and Hindi**



for more information  
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or

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**Free Events. All are cordially invited.**

For upcoming facebook live events, visit [www.facebook.com/ICCRSriLanka](https://www.facebook.com/ICCRSriLanka)

FRIDAY	<b>5</b> 5.00 pm	<b>Film Screening</b> <b>Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge</b> Venue: SVCC auditorium
SUNDAY	<b>7</b> 7.00 am	<b>Online Yoga Session</b> ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD HEALTH DAY <b>"PRANAYAM SADHNA FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS"</b> by Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga Expert from India
WEDNESDAY	<b>17</b> 7.00 am	<b>Online Yoga Session</b> ON THE OCCASION OF RAMNAVMI <b>"YOGA IN ASTAVAKRA GEETA"</b> by Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga Expert from India
FRIDAY	<b>19</b> 5.00 pm	<b>Film Screening - Black</b> Venue: SVCC Auditorium
WEDNESDAY	<b>24</b> 6.00 pm	<b>Hindustani vocal</b> Recital by Dr. Wijedasa Bandara Venue: SVCC Auditorium
FRIDAY	<b>26</b> 6.00 pm	<b>TABLA RECITAL</b> by Mr. Chathuralal Amarakoon Venue: SVCC auditorium