

The Buffalo Film Seminars



Conversations about great films with Diane Christian and Bruce Jackson



SATYAJIT RAY (2 May 1921, Calcutta, West Bengal, India—23 April 1992, Calcutta) is one of the half-dozen universally acknowledged masters of world cinema. Perhaps the best starting place for information on him is the excellent UC Santa Cruz web site, the "Satyajit Ray Film and Study Collection" <http://arts.ucsc.edu/rayFASC/>. It's got lists of books by and about Ray, a filmography, and much more, including an excellent biographical essay by Dilip Basu (<http://arts.ucsc.edu/rayFASC/detail.html>) from which the following notes are drawn:

Ray was born in 1921 to a distinguished family of artists, litterateurs, musicians, scientists and physicians. His grand-father Upendrakishore was an innovator, a writer of children's story books, popular to this day, an illustrator and a musician. His father, Sukumar, trained as a printing technologist in England, was also Bengal's most beloved nonsense-rhyme writer, illustrator and cartoonist. He died young when Satyajit was two and a half years old.

...As a youngster, Ray developed two very significant interests. The first was music, especially Western Classical music. He listened, hummed and whistled. He then learned to read music, began to collect albums, and started to attend concerts whenever he could. These interests and skills were to prove most useful when he chose to score music for his own films.

...His second interest was cinema, or 'bioscope', as it was called in the early years of Motion Pictures. He saw silent films as well as 'talkies' and started to compile scrapbooks with clippings culled from newspapers and magazines on Hollywood stars. He wrote fan letters to Deana Durbin who replied. [Ray] carefully put it in his scrapbook, along with pictures of Durbin. The Ray family has preserved this early scrapbook to this day. Ray wrote to Ginger Rogers too, but did not receive a reply. Billy Wilder received a "massive missive", a twelve-page long letter from Ray, now a young man who had developed a keen interest in the craft of cinema. The occasion was Ray's fascination with *Double Indemnity* which he saw in the late 1940's.

By this time a third dimension was added to Ray's passionate interest in cinema. This was Ray's exposure to and training in drawing at Kala Bhavan in Santiniketan. He joined the art school at his mother's insistence and [with] encouragement from Tagore, the great poet, who was a friend of his late father. While in Santiniketan Ray learned to draw from the great master-teacher Nandalal Bose, a pioneer in art education in Modern India. The other teacher who made an abiding impression on him was Binode Behari Mukherjee. Binode Bihari had trained in China and Japan. Calligraphic elements had entered his otherwise modernist oeuvre. With his natural talent in drawing, Ray later developed and deployed this element in his illustrations and graphic designs.



Ray did not complete the art course in Santiniketan. He returned to Calcutta, where among other things, he could see the Hollywood films he had enjoyed as an adolescent. While in Santiniketan, Ray had an unusual exposure to film theory, however. Deprived of the chance to frequent his favorite film-shows of the Golden Age variety, he read books on cinema. He read Rotha, Annheim and Spottiswoode. He discovered that his two passions - music and film- actually have a common convergence. Upon his return to Calcutta, he would go to the theater with a note-book. He was not just watching, he was studying as well. His apprenticeship in film-making began as a pleasurable self-pedagogy. This eventually put him on the path to making *Pather Panchali*. In retrospect, when his family background, early education and exposures are considered, he seems to have a perfect grounding to be a filmmaker.

Even the diversions in his early life helped pave this career path. His job at D. J. Keymer saw Ray blossom into a great graphic artist, typographer, book-jacket designer and illustrator (he would later sketch frames of his films). While at Keymore, he visited Jean Renoir, had intense discussion on cinema with him when the great French director was shooting *The River* outside Calcutta. Before this, he had established the Calcutta Film Society where he saw films by Capra, Ford, Huston, Mileston, Wilder, Wyler among others. He also saw films by Eisenstein (he heard Bach in them) and Pudovkins (where he heard Beethoven). During a six-month stint in London in 1950 he saw over one hundred films. Among them were *The Bicycle Thief* and *La Règle du Jeu* [*Rules of the Game*]. Both made a deep impression on Ray and later significantly influenced the craft of his film-making.

In 1950, Satyajit Ray was asked by a major Calcutta publisher to illustrate a children's edition of the *Pather Panchali*, Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee's semi-autobiographical novel. On his way back from London, with little to do on a two-week boat journey, Ray ended-up sketching the entire book. These formed the kernel and the essential visual elements in the making of *Pather Panchali*, Ray's very first film and the film that brought him instant international recognition and fame....

How he managed to make the film, pawning his rare music albums, his wife Bijoya's jewelry and his mother, Suprabha's networking in the Government circles in Calcutta, has now become a by-word in the annals of Indian film history. It also provides a paradigm on the "modes of production" in the kind of world cinema that stubbornly refuses to kowtow to commercial pressure. The paradigm required a perennial search for the elusive producer; an essential routine of most of Ray's movie-making career. If he had access to funds for the kind of films he wanted to make on his fiercely independent and nonnegotiable artistic terms, the world would have seen more diversity and many more period pieces in Ray's oeuvre: films based on ancient epics, the Mughals and the British Colonials. Instead, he limited himself to what was locally available and possible, refusing to stop or give in to commercial pressures. By 1992, the year he passed on, he had made forty films including shorts and documentaries. Some of these are all time classics, great and near-great films. Unlike his illustrious contemporaries Antonioni, Bergman, Fellini and Kurosawa, for example, he never made a film that can qualify as "bad" from the filmmaker's standpoint.

...After the completion of the *Apu Trilogy* (1959), regarded as a classic of World Cinema, Ray continued to work with amazingly diverse and varied material. With each film made in the 1960s, his reputation soared to new heights. Many distinguished awards and prizes came his way.

Satyajit Ray made modest amounts directing and making films. The producers reaped the profits from films that earned substantial revenues e.g. *The Apu Trilogy*, and *The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha* (1968). In the mid-sixties, for a couple of years he had no work. The solution to making ends meet for his small family surfaced this way. In 1968, a prominent editor of a widely

PATHER PANCHALI

(1955, 115 min., 122 within Bengal)

Also Known As: The Lament of the Path/The Saga of the Road/Song of the Road. Language: Bengali

Directed by Satyajit Ray
Written by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay (also novel) and Satyajit Ray
Original music by Ravi Shankar
Cinematography by Subrata Mitra
Film Editing by Dulal Dutta

Kanu Bannerjee.... Harihar Ray
Karuna Bannerjee.... Sarbojaya Ray
Subir Bannerjee.... Apu
Uma Das Gupta.... Durga
Chunibala Devi.... Indir Thakrun
Runki Banerjee.... Little Durga
Reba Devi.... Seja Thakrun
Aparna Devi.... Nilmoni's wife

read literary magazine in Bengali persuaded Ray to write a novella for its annual number. Ray the writer of whodunits, adventure stories, science fictions, appropriately illustrated by himself, made a dramatic appearance on the Bengali literary scene. In addition, there was no surcease since then in his literary output until the time he was taken to the hospital in 1992. His last writing, *My Years With Apu*, was published posthumously in 1994. He wrote some seventy novellas, stories and translations and each one of them became a

best seller in Bengali. The royalties from these various writings supported the Ray family, easing somewhat his anxiety to provide for his family. In the 70s and the 80s he chose to make a few films based on these stories: *Sonar Kella* (1974), *Joi Baba Felunath* (1978), *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (1980), *Pikoo* (1980), *Shakha Prashakha* (1990), *Uttoran* (1993). Sandip Ray [his son]directed the last film after Ray had passed away.

...One can locate three major contrapositional periods in Ray's work and life. The first period (1955-1964) was remarkable for its robust optimism, celebration of the human spirit as well as a certain satisfaction and self-confidence in assuming full auteurship. Ray was not only directing and scripting, he was scoring the music and increasingly taking charge of the camera-work. During this period, he directed, arguably, his greatest films following a trajectory that can be traced back to his family background, his education in art, music and letters, and to the East-West cultural confluence that captured what one can call "Calcutta Modern". One must point out that this phase coincides with the first flush of Independence in India or the idea of India that was being forged with yet to be tested forces of nationalism/internationalism, secularism, humanism and modernism of the Nehru era (1947-64).

From the mid-sixties through the seventies, all of the above came under a dark spell. There were two wars -- one with China early on and one with Pakistan in 1965. Growing unemployment among the urban middle classes, an agricultural crisis created by a command economy had brought parts of the country face-to-face with famine. In addition, there was an increased disaffection and restlessness among the intelligentsia and politicians. The war in Vietnam and the Cultural Revolution in China had radicalized Calcutta's urban youths and many of its artists, writers and filmmakers. Revolutionary violence and the violence of the counter-revolutionary forces gripped the city. Calcutta, noted as a friendly and safe city, became a dangerous place to live. The Bangladesh war and the influx of millions of refugees fleeing Pakistan...filled Calcutta and its outskirts. The successful Indian Army operations, the birth of Bangladesh as an independent nation were capped by India's first nuclear test in 1974. The anti-Indira Gandhi agitation led to the imposition of the "Emergency" in 1975. This gave Indians a bitter taste of living under an authoritarian government. The Government clamped harsh and draconian measures on the citizens. Yet there was hardly any signs of protest: people followed orders, streets were cleaner, the economy showed growth and the trains were running on time.

Ray however was troubled. The films he made during this period clearly projected a troubled vision of India. The "Calcutta Trilogy" *Paridwandii*, *Seemabaddha*, *Jana Aranya* was a powerful portrait of alienation, waywardness and moral collapse among the urban youth. *Aranyer Din Ratri*, a major film, shows a rape scene; *Ashani Sanket*, a grim and poignant narrative on the Bengal Famine of 1943 was made during the Bangladesh war. This film shows rape as well. *Shatranj Ke Khilari*, made during the Emergency shows through irony and the metaphor of a chess game how the king of Oudh, more a poet, composer and singer than a ruler submitted to the British take-over, as his people subjected themselves to the alien rule fleeing from the villages as the British-Indian Army marched in.

The two short films *Pikoo* and *Sadgati* refused to equivocate or distance themselves from issues of adultery and untouchability. Even his so-called "escapist" films, *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*, *Sonar Kella*, *Hirak Rajar Deshe*, *Joi Baba Felunath*, carried not-so-hidden messages against wars, crooks, goons and love of lucre and greed. In mid-life, at the height of his creative best, Ray seemed to have suffered a "crisis" -- arguably a personal one, but certainly one in his world-view, the way he looked at people and things around him. Increasingly, he became a loner, isolating himself in his Bishop Lefroy Road apartment. He even seriously considered leaving Calcutta - his beloved cinematic city.

The third and last phase saw Ray's "crisis" come full circle. He became even more isolated and distant, telling his telos in enunciatory terms. Unlike the early Ray genres, his films became frankly "wordy", declaring a didactic Ray voice that sought social correctives through acts of enunciation in cinema in *Ghare Baire*. Based on a Tagore novel, Ray was recasting Tagore's time-tested shibboleths against narrow nationalism, mix of religion and politics, demagogues and their dishonesties. Stricken by two heart attacks, Ray was now involuntarily isolated on doctor's orders. When his condition somewhat stabilized in 1987, he begged his doctors to let him make a film or two: modest family dramas shot indoors under their watchful eyes.

Before he passed on, he made three such pluvies (or movies that were more plays than movies) marking the years 1988, 1989 and 1990 as if he was counting time and using the medium for the message. *Ganashatru* addressed the questions of the late Capital corruption, and manipulation of religion, people, politics and environment. It is Ray's contemporary Indian version of Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*. *Shakha Prashakha* also addresses issues of the late Capitalism as it impacts family values corroding traditional generational bonding on the inside, and the fetishization of "black" money as the individuated upwardly ambitious try to make a living on the outside. To the protagonist-enunciator, who like Ray, is a heart patient, "honesty" becomes an obsessive compulsion mediated in the mood swings of music and madness. The signifier is a son who suffers the swings, seldom talks and is dysfunctional. The third in this

Trilogy is *Agantuk*. An emotionally charged film, Ray literally, plants his own voice in it. He briefly sings three times in place of the enunciator-protagonist. There is little doubt that the protagonist is Ray himself. Ray is a transnational. His global concerns and questions are articulated locally and nationally as the post-Cold War era is ushered in. Issues that are brought up implicate Ray and his visions: Who is an artist? How do his loved ones measure it? In monetary terms? Who is civilized and who is "primitive"? The world-traveller and the ethnographer reveals his telos at last. He is against narrowness of all sorts, against boundaries, borders and barriers. "Don't be a frog in the well," he tells his young grandnephew as he moves on [to] his next destination.

Two interesting books on Ray are Darius Cooper, *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray: Between Tradition and Modernity*, Cambridge U. Press, 1999, and Ben Nyce, *Satyajit Ray: a study of his films*, New York : Praeger, 1988. More interesting is Ray's own *My Years with Apu*, New Delhi and New York: Viking, 1994.

RAVI SHANKAR (7 April 1920, Benares, India), **bio from IMDb**: "Ravi Shankar is a world-renowned musician, composer, performer, and scholar of classical Indian music. ...His long and distinguished musical career includes numerous recordings, performances at all the world's leading venues, and a series of unprecedented collaborations with other leading musicians. Although he is well known because of his interaction with the popular music world, it is important to underscore that Shankar is considered the leading international figure in a very elevated art form, Hindustani music. Shankar was born on April 7, 1920, in Varanasi, India. He moved to Paris in 1930, and received most of his education there. From the age of 12, he performed as a musician and dancer on tour in Europe and America with his brother Uday Shankar, and in 1939 had his first concert as soloist at a music conference in Allahabad. By 1945 Shankar's reputation as the leading performer of traditional Hindustani music on the sitar had coalesced. He began to branch out as a composer, writing music for ballet and for important films such as *Dharti Ke Lal* and *Neecha Nagar*. He also composed the song *Sare Jahan Se Accha*, which is the most widely known piece of music in India, second only to the national anthem. In 1949, Shankar became Music Director of All-India Radio at Delhi, and founded the Vadya Vrinda Chamber Orchestra. The years 1950-55 were a particularly intense period of compositional activity, most notably in the internationally-acclaimed film studios of Calcutta, where he scored The Ray Trilogy. For his outstanding contribution to Indian music and culture, he received his first of five Presidential Awards in 1962, India's highest honor in the arts. In the mid-1960s, his preeminence as one of the world's leading serious musicians was augmented with wide popular success." Shankar is currently Regents Professor of Music at the University of California, San Diego.

David Shipman: The Apu films are to cinema what Proust is to literature: they are simply richer and more universal than most films ever made.

Akira Kurosawa: Not to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing in the world without seeing the sun or the moon.

Time 1958: 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.

Elia Kazan, Director, 1991: I want to add my voice to those of Scorsese and Merchant in asking the Academy grant Satyajit Ray an Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award. I have admired his films for many years and for me he is the filmic voice of India, speaking for the people of all classes of the country...He is the most sensitive and eloquent artist and it can truly be said in his case that when we honor him we are honoring ourselves.

James Ivory, Director, 1991: Satyajit Ray is among the world's greatest directors, living or dead...Isn't it curious that the newest, the most modern of the arts, has found one of its deepest, most fluent expressions in the work of an artist like Ray, who must make his seamless films--many have been masterpieces--in a chaotic and volatile corner of one of the world's oldest cultures, amidst the most stringent shortages of today's advanced movie-making material and equipment?...It would be fitting to honour this great man, who has influenced so many other film makers in all parts of the world, and to salute him with a Lifetime Award in the spring of 1992.

Martin Scorsese, Director, 1991: We would like to bring to your attention, and to the attention of the distinguished board of directors of the Academy, a master film-maker, Satyajit Ray..Though somewhat unwell, during the past few years he has completed two additional films, centered around his deeply humanitarian vision. His work is in the company of that of living contemporaries like Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa and Federico Fellini.



Clear Choices : Casting in Ray's Films

Ray had clear ideas as to what every character, certainly the main ones, looked like in his films. For the main characters, he visualized the faces in sketch-form before making a film in early period. In his later films he usually turned to actors and actresses, he had already worked with before. In short, Ray was very clear as to what kind of faces he wanted for particular roles.

In the first category, the story of how he found the little boy Apu in Pather Panchali has been told many times. Based on description of the boy in the novel by Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee, Ray and his team members continued to search for the "right" face until Mrs. Bijoya Ray located it in their old Calcutta neighborhood. The boy proved difficult; but Ray, taken by his looks, insisted on using him as Apu. Eventually, Subir Banerjee got used to Ray's playful approach to acting and did a wonderful job as Apu.

The story of how Ray and his unit found Chunibala Devi to play the old aunt is similar. After a long search and trying several older actresses he found the octogenarian Chunibala, an all but forgotten stage actress from 1920s. Sometimes Ray would approach someone he saw on the road, by chance, that he thought fitted the character he had in mind. Ray spotted Ramani Sengupta from a distance on the ghats of Banaras while location shooting *Aparajito*. Although Sengupta's somber personality intimidated him, Ray asked him whether he would be interested in acting the role of a grand uncle in the film he was about to shoot in the sacred city. "Why not?" came the answer. It turned out that not only had Sengupta never acted; he had never seen a movie in his life!

from World Film Directors v.II, ed. John Wakeman. The H.W.Wilson Co. NY 1988

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."

" . . . 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."

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-run advertising agency, D. J. Keymer & Co. He stayed with the firm for ten years, rising to senior art director.

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."

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, Bibhuti Bhushan 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."

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."

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 . . . [4,000 feet of film and 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.

[About this time Monroe Wheeler from MOMA visited looking for Indian material and suggested if Ray could finish the film would be part of exhibition.] 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."

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.)

"Villains bore me," Ray has remarked.

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.

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 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 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 spectaculars to work on one of his low-budget productions.

For all his fame, though, he remains amusedly indifferent to movie-world glamour. He lives with his family in a rambling 1920s apartment in North Calcutta, where he types his own scripts and answers his own phone, and where aspiring actors drop in at all hours without an appointment.

from *The St. James Film Directors Encyclopedia* Andrews, Sarris, Ed. Visible Ink Press Detroit 1998

Audiences in India who have responded warmly to Ray's early films have sometimes been troubled by the complexity of his middle films. A film like *Shatranj Ke Kilhari* was expected by many viewers to reconstruct the splendors of Moghul India as the early *Jalsaghar* had reconstructed the sensitivity of Bengali feudal landlords and *Charulata* the decency of upper class Victorian Bengal. What the audience found instead was a stern examination of the sources of Indian decadence. According to Ray, the British seemed less to blame for their role than the Indians who demeaned themselves by colluding with the British or by ignoring the public good and plunging into private pleasures. Ray's point of view in *Shatranj* was not popular with distributors and so his first Hindi film was denied fair exhibition in many cities in India.

NEXT WEEK IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS : Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg in Jean-Luc Godard's BREATHLESS/A BOUT DE SOUFFLE (1959). Nouvelle vague started here....*Breathless* is Godard's homage to American gangster films, with Jean-Paul Belmondo doing Bogart français, Jean Seberg as his American girlfriend, and Godard himself as a snitch. The BBC called *Breathless* "a landmark film, it forever changed perceptions of cinema." And in the weeks after that it's Paul Newman, Jackie Gleason, George C. Scott (twice!), John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, Woody Strode, Lee Marvin, Peter Sellers (three times in one movie!), Emil Jannings, Marlene Dietrich, Malcolm McDowell, Karen Black, Shelley Duvall, Scott Glenn, Lily Tomlin, Elliot Gould, Julie Christie, Harvey Keitel, Tony Curtis, Jack Lemmon, Joe E. Brown, Marilyn Monroe and more! Who said spring Tuesday nights in Buffalo weren't great? For details visit www.buffalofilmseminars.com.

"SCREENING THE FIFTIES" continues Thursdays at 7:30 at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. This week it's Elia Kazan's , *A Streetcar Named Desire* 1951, starring Marlon Brando, Vivien Leigh, Karl Malden and Kim Hunter. Then: Feb 28 Stanley Kubrick, *The Killing* 1956...March 7 Emile de Antonio, *Point of Order* 1964...and March 14, Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, *Singin' in the Rain* 1952. All hi-res DVD projection except *Point of Order*, which is available only in video. The Garden Restaurant will be open for dinner on screening nights. Call 716.270.8233 for information and reservations)

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