

The second part of our major Satyajit Ray season reveals the enduring versatility and masterly style of the Indian director. But his later output is marked by a darkening mood that reflects Ray's ambivalence towards the society he lived in, argues Andrew Robinson.



The Home and the World

Satyajit Ray: Part Two

This second part of Ray's career begins on a sunny note. **The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha** was his most popular film in Bengal, with children and adults singing its Bengali songs on the streets for months. 'Maharaja, We Salute You' was spontaneously sung by the crowds at Ray's funeral in 1992.

But then his mood darkened, first into the wincing irony of **Days and Nights in the Forest**, afterwards into a political trilogy: **The Adversary**, **Company Limited** and **The Middleman**. From 1969, the Naxalite movement inspired by Maoism rocked Bengal through terrorist acts by young Bengalis, followed by horrific police and army reprisals, and a period of national Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975, in which she became in effect a dictator. While Ray felt some sympathy for revolution, as shown in the relatively optimistic first film, he never supported violence, and was increasingly disgusted by the immorality of politicians, businessmen and ordinary individuals, skewered in the later two films.

His emotion-laden portrait of the man-made Bengal Famine of 1943, **Distant Thunder**, managed to retain faith in individual compassion, despite the historical death of millions from hunger and disease.

And his exquisite historical drama about the British military takeover of Lucknow in 1856, **The Chess Players**, was equally concerned with individual morality as with political systems. But his two detective films, **The Golden Fortress** and **The Elephant God**, based on his own Holmes-and-Watson-style Bengali duo, betrayed a declining belief in official justice. In **Deliverance**, a stark attack on the cruelty of Untouchability, Ray moved about as far from the hopefulness of **Pather Panchali** as it was possible to go.

Ray's last three films, though not without his trademark comedy, were urgent warnings to his fellow citizens against religious fundamentalism and social corruption. Unfortunately, they were prescient, given the notorious destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya in 1992 by a Hindu mob and numerous later bribery scandals. But they were also works of art that speak to everyone. As the great photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, a long-time Ray aficionado, truly remarked of **Branches of the Tree**: 'It is of distressing beauty'.

See p7 for Sharmila Tagore in person

See p20 for Ray course and poster display

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Arts and Sciences



The Academy Film Archive's Satyajit Ray Preservation Project is an ongoing effort to preserve and restore Ray's work. It began after he received an honorary Academy Award (1992): producers of the Oscar telecast were dismayed by the poor condition of the few US copies of his films. As he had worked on nonflammable 'safety' film, which can deteriorate in warm, moist environments (like India's) many of Ray's works were in jeopardy. The Academy collaborated with the Satyajit Ray Society, producers who worked with Ray, the National Archive of India, the Film Foundation, the Merchant Ivory Foundation and the Satyajit Ray Film and Study Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz. To date, the Academy has preserved 18 features and one short.

Restoration and Print Credits

Prints courtesy of the Satyajit Ray Film and Study Center Collection at the Academy Film Archive

Ray
The Inner Eye
Bala
The Golden Fortress
The Kingdom of Diamonds
Deliverance
Pikoo
The Home and the World
An Enemy of the People
Branches of the Tree
The Stranger

Restored by the Satyajit Ray Preservation Project at the Academy Film Archive.
Print courtesy of the Academy Film Archive

Company Limited
The Middleman
The Chess Players
The Elephant God
The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha
Sikkim
Two



▲ Ray

India 1999. Dir Goutam Ghosh. 105min
Goutam Ghosh's documentary begins with Audrey Hepburn at the affecting Oscar ceremony in 1992 where Ray was unavoidably absent, and closes with his childhood encounter with Rabindranath Tagore who wrote a vital poem in his autograph book. The rest is largely chronological, with celebrated highlights from the films linked to recorded comments by Ray. The frequent and intelligent attention to Ray's drawings and shooting notebooks, plus musical extracts, captures his exceptional versatility.

Sun 1 Sept 20:40 NFT2
Wed 4 Sept 20:40 NFT2



▲

The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha

India 1968. With Tapen Chatterjee, Rabi Ghosh, Santosh Dutta. 118min. EST. U
Based on a story by his grandfather, *The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha* released Ray's pent-up love of fantasy, given free rein in his grandfather's writing and song-composing. The film is iconic in Bengal – and admired by Salman Rushdie – but its spell has not been so strong in the West. The six-and-a-half-minute 'Dance of the Ghosts' is a tour-de-force. Plus, **Two** (1964. 15min), an enchanting, wordless short about a rich boy's rivalry with a poor boy.

Sun 1 Sept 18:00 NFT2
Sat 7 Sept 15:40 NFT2

INTRO



Days and Nights in the Forest Aranyer Din Ratri

India 1970. With Soumitra Chatterjee, Rabi Ghosh, Sharmila Tagore. 115min. EST. PG

As in *Kanchenjunga*, a group of Calcutta Bengalis – four young male friends – are taken out of their normal urban environment. They go on a jaunt by car to a tribal area, in search of some alcoholic, sexual and other adventures, while staying in a remote forest bungalow. In the course of a few days, each man experiences an epiphany at the hands of various women in a scintillating comedy of manners.

* Introduced by Sharmila Tagore

Mon 2 Sept 20:45 NFT1
Mon 16 Sept 18:00 NFT1*



The Adversary Pratidwandi

India 1970. With Dhritiman Chatterjee, Indira Devi, Debraj Roy. 110min. EST. PG

Ray's most openly political film, based on a novel by Sunil Ganguli, was an up-to-the minute response to the mayhem of the Naxalite movement in Bengal. Its protagonist, played with compelling assurance by Dhritiman Chatterjee, is a young college graduate with a conscience desperately searching for a job in 'a nightmare city', as Ray described Calcutta in 1970. His younger brother, chillingly convincing, chooses to follow the path of violence.

Thu 5 Sept 20:45 NFT1
Sun 8 Sept 20:45 NFT1



Bala

Sikkim

India 1971. 55min

Documentary attracted Ray most when it focused on an individual. Sikkim, however, is a portrait of a small Himalayan state, politically independent in 1971 but absorbed into India in 1975. Ray was commissioned by its ruler, which limited his freedom; later, the film was suppressed by an over-sensitive Indian government. Sikkim contains lovely, poetic scenes.

+ The Inner Eye

India 1972. 20min. Some EST

The Inner Eye is small masterpiece about the career of a painter, Binode Bihari Mukherjee, perhaps the finest modern Indian artist, despite the fact that he went blind. He was also Ray's teacher, so his film is both personal and profound, ending with Mukherjee's statement: 'Blindness is a new feeling, a new experience, a new state of being.'

+ Bala

India 1976. 31min

Bala shows off Balasaraswati, a great exponent of Bharata Natyam dance, which originated in south India, with skill and reverence.

Fri 6 Sept 20:40 NFT2
Sat 7 Sept 18:40 NFT3



Distant Thunder Ashani Sanket

India 1973. With Soumitra Chatterjee, Babita, Ramesh Mukherjee. 101min. EST. PG

The famine of 1943 impinged on Ray through corpses in Calcutta's streets. Afterwards he felt guilt that he had done nothing to help the victims. *Distant Thunder*, from a novel by Bibhutibhusan Banerjee, was his response. But it contains only one corpse, and instead focuses on a starving rural Brahmin couple whose ancient caste restrictions are finally overturned by compassion. Gorgeous colours underline the coexistence of natural beauty with human cruelty.

Sat 7 Sept 20:40 NFT2
Tue 10 Sept 20:40 NFT2



Company Limited Seemabaddha

India 1971. With Barun Chanda, Sharmila Tagore, Parumita Chowdhury. 112min. EST. U

Following the official clamp-down on the Naxalite movement, Calcutta entered a period of relative calm, in which many kinds of corruption flourished. *Company Limited* depicts the well-heeled, anglicised business community in Calcutta known as the boxwallahs, familiar to Ray from his job in advertising. An ambitious executive willing to sacrifice his integrity for promotion finds his conscience pricked by an attractive sister-in-law he wishes to impress, played by Sharmila Tagore.

* Introduced by Sharmila Tagore

Sun 8 Sept 16:15 NFT1
Mon 16 Sept 20:45 NFT1*



The Golden Fortress Sonar Kella

India 1974. With Soumitra Chatterjee, Santosh Dutta, Siddhartha Chatterjee. 115min. EST

In the first film about his detective Feluda, Ray avoided the whodunit structure of his novel, *Sonar Kella*. Instead, the audience come to know the villains early on, while the detective is kept guessing – as in a Hitchcock film. The plot involves the kidnapping of a boy, who claims to have known in a previous life an ancient 'golden fortress' in Rajasthan; the villains hope he will lead them to buried treasure.

Sun 8 Sept 18:20 NFT2
Wed 11 Sept 20:30 NFT3



The Middleman Jana Aranya

India 1975. With Pradip Mukherjee, Satya Banerjee, Utpal Dutt. 131min. EST

In the last of Ray's political trilogy, a sinister tragi-comedy that somehow escaped Emergency censorship, corruption has infected Calcutta's marrow. Again, a young man struggles to find work in business, but now he gradually persuades himself to do virtually anything necessary for success, encouraged by a Dickensian cast of shady characters, such as a dapper PRO played by the fascinating Rabi Ghosh. 'The story demanded black and white,' Ray emphasised.

Sat 14 Sept 20:30 NFT2
Tue 24 Sept 20:30 NFT2



The Chess Players Shatranj Ke Khilari

India 1977. With Sanjeev Kumar, Saeed Jaffrey, Amjad Khan. 120min. EST. PG

In his first Hindi feature, Ray recreated the period just before the Indian Mutiny/Uprising of 1857. Two minor Lucknow noblemen are obsessed with playing chess, ignoring the political chess game of the British preparing to annex their princely state. A superb cast including the Bollywood actor Amjad Khan and Richard Attenborough, exquisite dialogue, music and dance, and magnificent sets, bring to life the decadent court of King Wajid Ali Shah.

Thu 12 Sept 20:40 NFT1
Sat 14 Sept 18:20 NFT1



The Elephant God Joi Baba Felunath

India 1977. With Soumitra Chatterjee, Santosh Dutta, Siddhartha Chatterjee. 112min. EST. PG

The second detective film about Feluda, more sombre than the first, takes him to the crooked lanes of Varanasi (Benaras). The Ganges ghats on which Apu gazed in wide-eyed curiosity in *Aparajito* become the shop-front of thieves and swindlers in *The Elephant God*. A fake holy man is in league with one of his 'devotees', a vicious businessman playing stolen antiquities. The Graham Greene-like contrast between appearances and reality excited Ray.

Sat 14 Sept 15:30 NFT2
Fri 20 Sept 18:10 NFT2



The Kingdom of Diamonds Hirak Rajar Deshe

India 1980. With Soumitra Chatterjee, Utpal Dutt, Tapen Chatterjee. 118min. EST

The fantasy characters, Goopy and Bagha, return in this musical, but the mood is less carefree than in the first film. They confront a king who is clearly a ruthless tyrant, willing to use a technique of brainwashing invented by a magician-cum-scientist at court. The colour is sumptuous, and Ray's songs are witty and openly political, if impossible to translate fully. He had the 1975-77 Emergency in mind while directing.

Sun 15 Sept 18:20 NFT2
Tue 17 Sept 20:40 NFT2



The Home and the World Ghare Baire

1984. With Soumitra Chatterjee, Victor Banerjee, Swatilekha Chatterjee. 140min. EST. U

Tagore's best-known novel, *The Home and the World*, appeared in the aftermath of Bengal's abortive Swadeshi ('Our Country') movement of the early 20th century – the first stirrings of India's later freedom movement under Mahatma Gandhi. Ray's adaptation does not underplay the patriotic issues, but weaves them into the behaviour of three key individuals: a liberal landowner, his sheltered wife and his college friend who is both political leader and seducer.

Sat 21 Sept 17:50 NFT2
Wed 25 Sept 20:15 NFT2



Deliverance Sadgati

India 1988. With Om Puri, Smita Patil, Richa Mishra. 118min. EST. PG

Deliverance, made in Hindi for national television from a Prem Chand story, is, devoid of poetry: 'a deeply angry film,' said Ray, 'but it is not the anger of an exploding bomb, but of a bow stretched taut and quivering.' Smita Patil and Om Puri play a poor Untouchable village couple hoping for a blessing on their child by a Brahmin priest. In keeping with religious sanction, the priest callously exploits his caste inferior.

+ *Pikoo*

India-France 1981. With Arjun Guha Thakurta, Apama Sen, Soven Lahiri. 26min. EST

Pikoo, a masterly short made for French television, derives from Ray's short story about a young boy's diary. *Pikoo* lives in a prosperous Calcutta household where he observes the tension between his mother, father, grandfather, elder brother and servants without comprehending its cause: his mother's affair with an 'uncle'. The film's finest moments, such as *Pikoo*'s attempt to draw a flower in the garden, are wordless.

Sat 21 Sept 20:10 NFT3
Tue 24 Sept 17:40 NFT2



An Enemy of the People Ganashatru

India 1989. With Soumitra Chatterjee, Ruma Guha Thakurta, Mamata Shankar. 100min. EST. U

Ray suffered a major heart attack in 1983, which restricted him to shooting mainly in a studio. His first film after recovery was deliberately based on a theatre play, Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. Thoroughly transposed from 1880s Norway to 1980s Bengal, so that it concerns the pollution of 'holy water' in a Hindu temple, it deals with fundamentalism, and powerfully dramatises the friction between politics, religion and science.

Sun 22 Sept 16:00 NFT2
Sun 29 Sept 21:00 NFT1



Branches of the Tree Shakha Prasakha

France 1990. With Ajit Banerjee, Haradhan Banerjee, Soumitra Chatterjee. 130min. EST

Funded by Gérard Depardieu and another French producer, who gave Ray carte blanche, *Branches of the Tree* is an original screenplay about a family at war around their father – a bedridden heart patient with a somewhat spooky resemblance to Ray. The patriarch is a self-made industrialist with a clean record, unlike two of his four sons. Their incendiary clash over corruption at dinner is among the most dramatic scenes in Ray's oeuvre.

Fri 27 Sept 20:30 NFT2
Tue 1 Oct 20:30 NFT2



▲ The Stranger Agantuk

France-India 1991. With Utpal Dutt, Dipankar Dey, Mamata Shankar. 120min. EST. U

In his swansong film, Ray lightened the basic mood, after the bleakness of *Branches of the Tree*. *The Stranger* is partly a comedy, as noted by western reviewers, but for Bengalis it has many moods, as it dissects a family's reaction to the return of a long-lost relative. It recalls Jean Renoir's classic *La Règle du Jeu*, of which Ray remarked: 'Humanist? Classical? Avant-garde? Contemporary? I defy anyone to give it a label.'

Tue 1 Oct 18:00 NFT1
Sat 5 Oct 20:40 NFT1

The Big City Mahanagar

Wonderfully enjoyable, with the scope and density of a great novel, Satyajit Ray's tale of family and city life is set in mid-50s Calcutta, a society still adjusting to Independence.

Subrata Mazumdar (Anil Chatterjee), a young bank clerk struggling to support his family on a meagre salary, is horrified when his wife Arati (a ravishing performance from Madhabi Mukherjee) dares to challenge his cherished belief that 'a woman's place is in the home'. She not only takes a job but proves a huge success, relishing her independence and thoroughly upsetting the family dynamic. Bengali star Mukherjee, working with Ray for the first time, confessed herself 'stunned' by his extraordinary 'woman-centred' screenplay, so different from anything she had previously encountered. Yet, for all his focus on Arati, Ray – who is renowned for his breadth of sympathy – also deploys warmth, humour and acute psychological insight in his depiction of Arati's conservative father-in-law, her studious teenage sister-in-law and her benevolently despotic boss. Newly restored and re-released to mark its fiftieth anniversary, *The Big City* with its emphasis on conflicting social values – and most particularly the role of women – still feels sharply relevant. – *Margaret Deriaz*

India 1963. Dir Satyajit Ray. With Anil Chatterjee, Madhabi Mukherjee. 135min. Digital. EST. PG. A BFI release.

Continued from August
Sun 1 – Thu 12 Sept

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