

## **Martin Scorsese writes: ‘Satyajit Ray’s artistry, filmmaking took my breath away’**

Oscar-winning filmmaker Martin Scorsese writes about the intimate image of India that Satyajit Ray’s films presented to the world

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**Subir Banerjee in Pather Panchali**

In the relatively short history of cinema, Satyajit Ray is one of the names that we all need to know, whose films we all need to see. And to revisit, as I do pretty frequently.

For those of us here in the West, the Apu trilogy — Pather Panchali (1955), Aparajito (1956) and Apur Sansar (1959) — was a milestone. We were used to seeing India on screen but through a purely colonial perspective, which obviously meant that the principal characters were Westerners and the “extras”, the people who provided the local colour and the background detail, were Indians. We had no idea whether the stories were happening in Gujarat, Kashmir, West Bengal or Maharashtra — it was just “India”.

Jean Renoir’s film *The River* (1951), on which Ray helped with location scouting, was a different kind of experience, a film made from a deep love for India and for Bengali culture. But all the major

characters (with the exception of Melanie, played by Radha Burnier) are either English or American.

So, for most of us here in the West, seeing the trilogy for the first time was a bracing and eye-opening experience, and a very moving one as well. The people that had been in the background of so many movies were now the characters in the foreground. The pictures told stories of everyday life in a vein that was somewhat similar to Italian neo-realism. And the artistry? The filmmaking? It took my breath away. It was poetic, immediate, sweeping and intimate, all at the same time.

I saw all three pictures in one sitting in a theatre in Manhattan. I was mesmerised. That remarkable close-up of Apu's eye in *Pather Panchali*, the way the cut works with the sudden burst of Ravi Shankar's music — for me, that was one of those precious revelatory moments you have in a movie theatre, and it had a profound and lasting effect on me as a filmmaker.

And the trilogy was only the beginning of one of the greatest bodies of work in the history of cinema.

We all need to see the films of Satyajit Ray and re-see them, again and again. Taken all together, they're one of our greatest treasures.

*Martin Scorsese is an Oscar-winning Italian-American film director, screenwriter, producer.*

Reference:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/express-sunday-eye/satyajit-ray-artistry-filmmaking-pather-panchali-martin-scorsese-6423779/>