

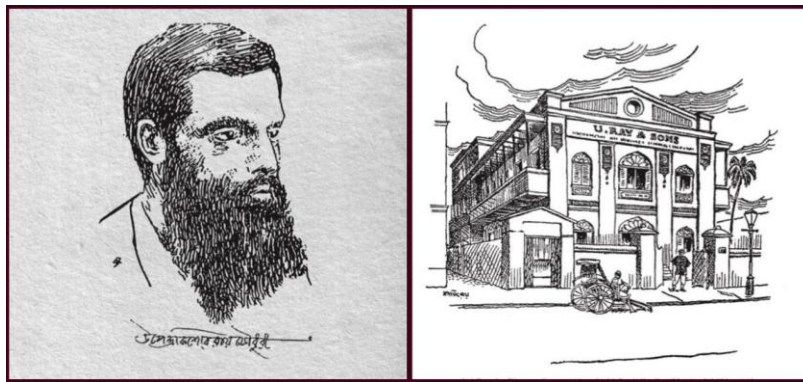
## BOOK EXCERPT

### **Ray 100: Satyajit Ray on his grandfather Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury, whom he never saw**

May 2, 2021 is Satyajit Ray's 100th birth anniversary.

Satyajit Ray

May 02, 2021 · 08:30 am



Satyajit Ray's drawings of his grandfather Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury and of the family house in Garpar, Calcutta.

I have no personal memory of Upendrakishore; and it's not possible to have any because he passed away six years before my birth.

The house which he had built on 100 Garpar Road and the same house where he died was also the house where I was born. My childhood was spent in this house and quite a bit of my growing up years were occupied in one particular portion of the building, within which was housed the U Ray & Sons printing press.

What work was being done in that press, how it was being done, how exactly this press was different from the other such presses – I still wasn't old enough to understand such logistics. Six years after this business had folded up I left Garpar and went to live in Bhawanipore in a completely different milieu. The only link with U Ray & Sons that

remained was through a few books written by him, a few bound volumes of Sandesh, some of his own drawings and the prints of his paintings.

**As I had not had the fortune to meet Upendrakishore and know him personally, perhaps that was why I tried to discover him through his writings and drawings time and again.**

This quest for discovery is still on. Thanks to the revival of the Sandesh magazine in the recent past, I have had the opportunity to go through the writings and paintings published during his association with Sandesh, once again in detail.

While studying his works repeatedly I realised that in the way Upendrakishore had captured the spirit of juvenile literature, he remains matchless even today. And the persona that appears through these paintings and writings, is that of a calm yet vivacious, level-headed and dynamic person who is indeed a rare personality.

If one judges, it can be easily said that in the world of children's literature there's none to equal Upendrakishore. The essence of literature along with his charming language that's found in Tuntunir Boi (The Tailorbird Book), Chheleder Mahabharat (Mahabharata for Young Boys), Chhotoder Ramayan (Ramayana for Children) or in the numerous articles, poems, or stories which have appeared in Sandesh, despite belonging to a genre of literature meant for all, without doubt, every child can enjoy the true spirit of these writings.

In Bengal there's a significant body of children's writings whose true spirit can perhaps be appreciated only by the adult reader. This holds true in the case of children's works by writers like Rabindranath, Abanindranath, and even in case of writings by Sukumar Ray and Lila Majumdar. The flavour which you discover reading Ha-ja-ba-ra-la (A Topsy-Turvy Tale) or Buro-Angla (The Big Adventures of a Little Hero) is certainly not the same flavour you enjoy when you read Tuntunir Boi.

To appreciate Tuntunir Boi at a mature age you need to awaken the child hidden in your heart.

The magic of Upendrakishore's writings is the ease with which it stimulates and rouses the innocence of a child's mind. For how many writers of children's literature can you say the same?

**The two most amazing qualities of Upendrakishore as an artist are his multifacetedness – his versatility, and a successful synthesis of eastern and western art in his talent.**

He has chiefly produced two kinds of art. One was his favourite oil paintings, the majority of which were landscapes and the other were his illustrations. There is no doubt that his real expertise lay in the oil paintings. I've personally seen many of these – the Sal forest of Giridih, the Usri River, the hills of Darjeeling, or the sea of Puri. The most noticeable feature of these drawings is that the nature's unique beauty, disposition or mood seemed to have left an indelible impression on him – and that was the quality of profound serenity. This tranquil moment touches on a note of mystical ecstasy in his personality.

The technique used in these paintings doesn't reveal any garish manipulation nor is there any overtone of colours. It almost seems as if the artist's message is – “Here my role is non-existent; it is nature that is omnipresent. Nature is beautiful, nature is serene; hence my picture is beautiful and serene, too.” The presence of this element of devout worship comes out as the most distinguished element in all his paintings.

Both content and method mark his oil paintings, but the exact opposite is observed in his illustrations. The poets of East and West spoke of harmony – this comes out alive in all his illustrations. Even if his technique leaned towards the West, the illustrations he used for the Indian stories, did not bear the evidence of western or mixed in influences. And being a scientist himself, even while dismissing

anatomy he did not adopt the so-called Oriental style of over imposed embellishments in his drawings.

Yet, within this boundary of naturalism, he produced a marvellous range of styles. On the one hand there was the influence of the English academic art, the Japanese woodcut, Rajput and Mughal miniatures, even the use of Bengal folk elements and on the other, the use of extraordinary power of personal observation – in all what Upendrakishore created was discernible a style that was essentially his own.

**With the result, every time one came across his work one never mistook it as someone else's.**

In the first three volumes of his Sandesh, during the last phase of his output, and in the illustrations done for the book Hindustani Upokotha (Folk Tales of Hindustan) compiled by Sita Devi and Shanta Devi, one sees the finest examples of his creativity.

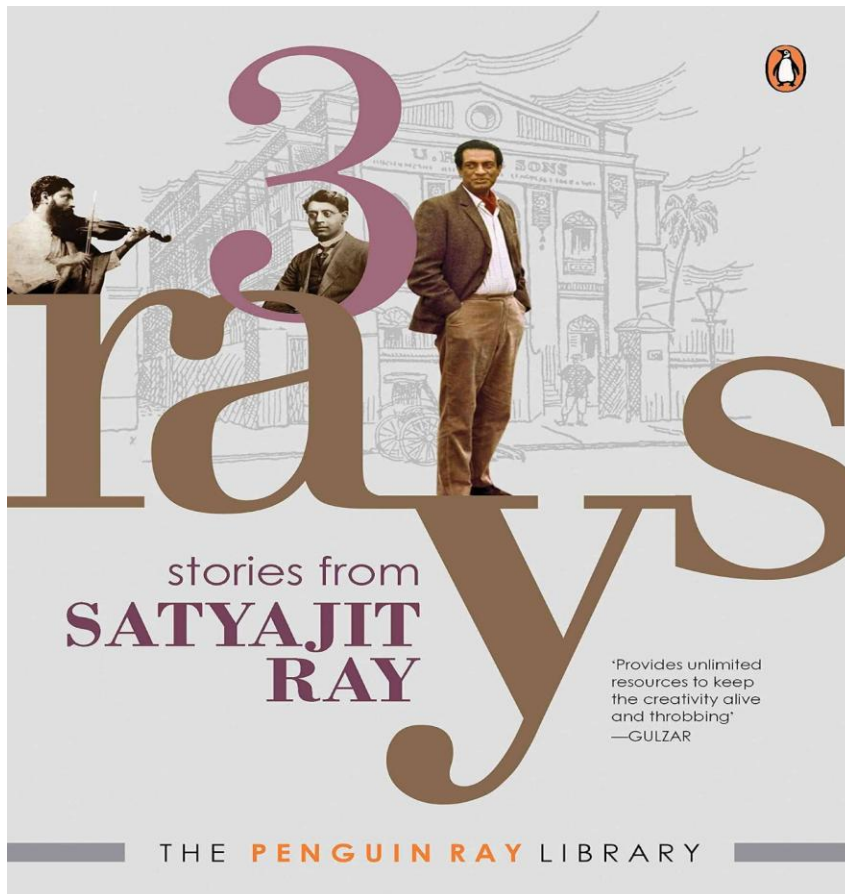
The indispensable relationship which the form and the language share is something that is beautifully reflected in Upendrakishore's writings. Those who have missed out on reading his articles and essays on science written for children would never get to know how such a difficult subject can be addressed with such lucidity.

This simplicity perhaps highlights all of Upendrakishore's creative activities. Only after putting in serious efforts, imagination, thoughts, thorough research and intense hard work, can one arrive at this level of effortless. Those who are real artists have the capacity to unravel the mysteries of all creative acts.

While living in Calcutta, improving on the concept of half-tone block printing, or writing such an exemplary children's book such as Tuntunir Boi, or composing a song like Jago Purobasi / Bhagavata Prem Piyasi (Awake citizens / those who desire the love of god), it was

Upendrakishore who alone was capable of producing such an amazing range of work all by himself.

*The original Bengali essay, written and read by Satyajit Ray at Mahabodhi Society Hall, Kolkata, during the centenary celebration of Upendrakishore, was first published in Prabandha, Puja Annual, 1963. It was translated into English by Indrani Majumdar.*



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