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Satyajit Ray: A human facets of a genius | Tarun Kumar Basu

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by Tarun Kumar Basu

Satyajit Ray birth centenary: A tribute to the cine-maestro

Legendary motion-film director Satyajit Ray's birth centenary was observed on May 2, last week. This year is the birth centenary of the auteur. Born into a reputed cultural family, Satyajit Ray (1921-1992) was an artist, film-maker, motion film director, writer, composer, Often touted as a figure that put Indian cinema into a new dimension in the universe of cinematography. He was from a family prominent in the world of arts and literature. Satyajit Ray was the successor of Sukumar Ray and Upendrakishore Ray, who were an illustrator, writer, publisher and a figurehead of the Brahmo Samaj, a religious and social movement in nineteenth century Bengal. He had crowned eleven international prizes for his masterpiece " Pather Panchali"(song of the little road), the first part of the magisterial Apu Trilogy, which won best human document at Cannes. After a tremendous financial hardships the shooting of this film halted for over a year. The Trilogy includes "Aparajito" (1956) and "Apu Sansar" (1959). Satyajit Ray received an Honorary Academy Award in 1992, becoming the first Indian to receive Oscars for "Life Time Achievement". He's the second Indian to have won an Oscar. The first was Bhanu Athaiya in 1983.

The prolific film-maker Satyajit Ray Visited Shantiniketan with his mother at early age. After completing his graduation in Economics from Presidency College in Kolkata, Satyajit Ray went to

Shantiniketan in 1940, to study painting at the world famous university, Visva-Bharati founded by Rabindranath Tagore, despite his initial reluctance. Later it was proved that Rabindranath Tagore's work and philosophy has had a strong influence on Satyajit Ray's life and activities. At Shantiniketan, Ray met the eminent artist Benode Behari Mukherjee, who was severely myopic in one eye and blind in the other and at last he became completely blind after few years. Satyajit Ray was deeply influenced and inspired by Benode Behari's artwork. He was then devoted to his teacher and started learning painting. He received tutelage under the great artist Nandalal Bose in Kala Bhavan. During this period, he explored the oriental art, Indian sculpture, miniature painting and Japanese woodcuts. As a tribute to his teacher, Ray produced a documentary on Binode Behari Mukherjee, – "The Inner Eye" in 1972

After he finished his graduation in economics from Presidency College, Satyajit Ray started working as an art director at a British-run advertising agency at D J Keymer. Later, he moved to D K Gupta's newly-opened publishing house, the Signet Press. He was then promoted as an art director within a few years, and also worked for a publishing house as a commercial illustrator. Later on he became popular as a leading Indian typographer and book-jacket designer. The book he illustrated in 1944, was the novel "Pather Panchali" by Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyaya. He had immense interest in artworks, so, he continued to work in publishing houses as a commercial illustrator too. Satyajit Ray was encouraged in his cinematic ambitions by the French director Jean Renoir in 1949, who was then in West Bengal to shoot "The River". The popular film "The Bicycle Thief" in 1948, by Vittorio De Sica with its downbeat story and with nonprofessional actors persuaded Satyajit Ray to strive to make a film Pather Panchali and its two sequels, known as the Apu Trilogy that was completed in 1955 and turned out to be both a commercial and a tremendous critical success. As a result of great directorship, the film was awarded at the Cannes

International Film Festival in 1956. Akira Kurosawa, A Japanese filmmaker, and Ray were familiar. Kurosawa said of his work, "To have not seen the films of Ray is to have lived in the world without ever having seen the moon and the sun." He was made a Fellow of the British Film Institute in recognition of his outstanding contribution to film culture. He became a member of the jury at the Venice Film Festival in 1982. Famous Director Alexander Payne said, "I watch older films mostly. I recently saw "The Music Room" (1958), by Indian director Satyajit Ray. It is a jaw dropper, an unbelievable movie. There are so many great old ones to see that I can't be bothered with new ones unless a number of people say 'this is really good you should see it.'" Richard Attenborough, an eminent film-maker said, "I was honoured that one of the world's greatest directors was eager to direct me. I submitted myself totally to him and found him to be a true actor's director. His sense of the script and details are unparalleled".

His films encircle a diversity of techniques, mood and genres including satire, comedy and tragedy. Usually he experimented his films with surrealism and fantasy. The main distinctive art of Ray's film is that the rhythm in his films seems meditative. There is a musing quality in the impressive flow of images and sounds that elicits an attitude of acceptance and detachment that is deeply Indian style.

Satyajit Ray's films are the recipient of 32 National Awards. He was honoured with the Lgion d'honneur (Legion of Honour) in 1987 by the President of France. The covers of book Jawahar Lal Nehru's Discovery of India was designed by Satyajit Ray. He was given India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna in 1992, who directed 36 films, comprising of features, documentaries and short stories. He died on 23rd April, 1992 at the age of seventy.

(Author: Tarun Kumar Basu is a freelance journalist.)

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