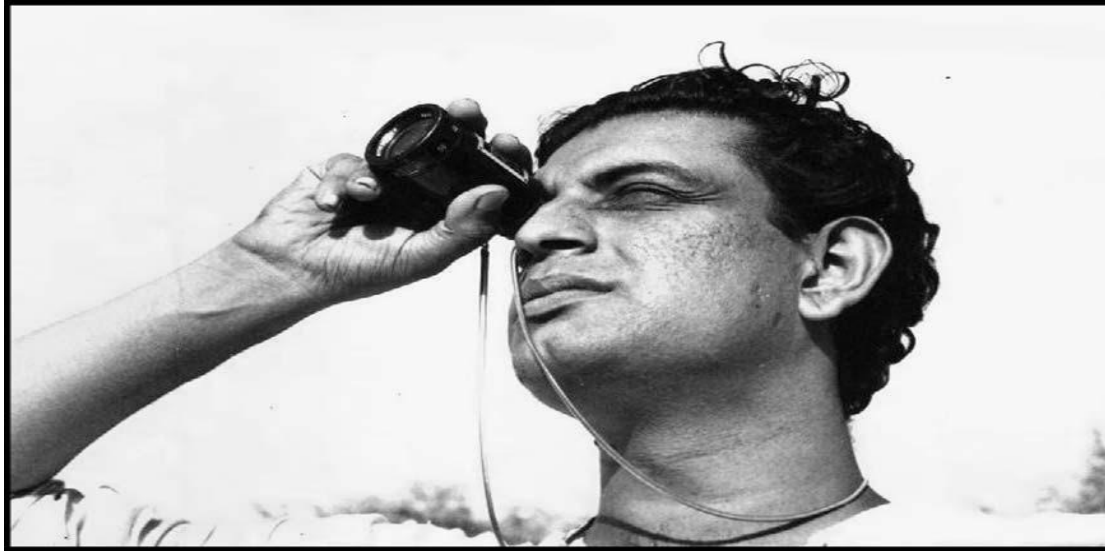


# Satyajit Ray's world of cinemagic

Information Desk

GetBengal, 2 May, 2021 14:10:44



It is our misfortune that most people in India as well as abroad know Satyajit Ray almost exclusively as a brilliant world-class filmmaker. There are others who are a little more aware of the maestro's multi-faceted talents and know him not only as a master film director but also as a gifted scriptwriter, documentary filmmaker, author, lyricist, magazine editor, illustrator, calligrapher, and music composer.

But only those who grew up reading Ray's short stories and detective fiction in Bengali know about the most endearing aspect of the great film-maker: Ray was a hardcore geek who was fascinated by crime, science, magic, the supernatural, aliens, artificial intelligence and robots. This fascination comes through in the dozens of short stories he wrote (quite literally dozens, as he always published these stories in bunches of 12 and played around with the Bengali word for 12, 'baro').

Not only did Ray write about robots and aliens and evil scientists, he thought deeply and seriously about them. His stories contain the evidence of a playful mind that loved this kind of geeky stuff, but that also dived into the complex layers of morality and ethics of many of these topics. He was not just writing crowd-pleasing 'children's

literature' using tropes that would draw geeky kids in — he was genuinely obsessed with them and used them to explore questions of ethics, identity and tensions between humans and nature. Ray's fascination with magic grew early in his life and can be traced back to his childhood. Ray lost his father Sukumar Ray when he was merely two-and-a-half years old. At the age of six, his mother moved to Bhawanipore to stay with her brother, Ray's 'Sona Mama.'



Satyajit Ray is four years old

The old sprawling house at Bhawanipore opened an entire world of possibilities for young Ray. In the quiet lazy summer afternoons, he would spend hours alone looking at the rays of light penetrating the bedroom through venetian blinds and discover strange patterns forming on the walls. He discovered a novel equipment in the house. It was a stereoscope machine which is a device for viewing a stereoscopic pair of separate images, depicting left-eye and right-eye views of the same scene, as a single three-dimensional image. Young Ray was also mesmerized by the magic lantern which was a projection device that used pictures—paintings, prints, or photographs—on transparent plates (usually made of glass), one or more lenses, and a light source to recreate images. The magic lantern was responsible for starting Ray's passion for films. This was because the light from the lamp threw moving images from the revolving film onto a wall, resembling an actual movie. This fascinated Ray and he became passionate about film-making.

While staying at his maternal uncle's house in Bakulbagan, Bhawanipore, Ray was often taken to movies theatres to watch movies and had the opportunity to go and see circus, magic shows, carnivals etc. Once he went to Empire Theatre (later renamed Roxy), Ray went to watch a magic show by an European magician named Shefallo. He distracted his audience with his non-stop patter as he performed the tricks. A lady magician named Madame Palermo also performed at the venue but she enacted her stunts in complete silence and mesmerized her audience.

Ray later happened to watch a Bengali magician performing at a wedding venue and he was immensely impressed. In fact, he was so enamoured by the local magician's skills that he found Shefallo's performance on stage pale in comparison.

A few days later, young Ray suddenly encountered the local magician at the junction of Bakulbagan and Shyamananda Road. Clad in a plain dhoti and a shirt, he looked no different from other ordinary men, yet he was a powerhouse of talent, an extraordinary magician, a man who influenced Ray tremendously. Ray was flushed with excitement to see his icon right before him and interact with him as well but in his eagerness, he forgot to ask his name or take down his address. He never met him again. Many years later, he included this magician as a character in one of his short stories.

Ray's obsession with magic continued till his college days. He bought quite a few books on magic and practiced sleight of hand, standing before a mirror. As we know magic shatters the rigid walls of reality and ushers the audience into a world of infinite possibility. It transforms illusions to reality. Likewise, a film also beckons us into its world and we are transported to a fantasy world of colorful sights and sounds. Both magic and cinema require skill and story-telling and both offer an escape from the drudgery and monotony of our routine life. Both the forms entertain adults and children alike. Ray was a creative person at heart who enjoyed telling stories with moving images and entertaining people. So, he graduated from magic to film making.

Reference:

<https://www.getbengal.com/details/satyajit-rays-world-of-cinemagic>