

SATYAJIT RAY: ESSAYS (1970–2005). By GASTON ROBERGE. pp. 280. New Delhi, Manohar, 2007.
doi:10.1017/S1356186309009845

Anyone studying the history of India over the past two centuries is likely to learn much from the oeuvre of Satyajit Ray: it comprises more than 30 films, made between *Pather Panchali* in 1955 and his death in 1992, shortly before which he received an Oscar award for a lifetime achievement. A gifted story writer, book illustrator and graphic designer, as well as a film director, his was a daunting creativity, as I discovered while writing his biography, *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye*, in the 1980s.

Ray's films cover a remarkable range of period. To mention just a few of the most celebrated ones, *The Chess Players* (*Shatranj ke Khilari*, 1977) depicts the British annexation of Oudh in 1856. *The Goddess* (*Devi*, 1960) is a study of extreme Hindu orthodoxy in the 1860s. *The Lonely Wife* (*Charulata*, 1964) captures the atmosphere of the Bengal Renaissance in the late nineteenth century. The Apu Trilogy (*Pather Panchali*, *Aparajito* and *Apur Sansar*, 1955–59), Ray's most famous films, span the first three or four decades of the twentieth century, as the boy Apu grows into adulthood. *Distant Thunder* (*Asani Sanket*, 1973) grapples with the devastating Bengal Famine of 1943–44. Post-1947 Bengal is treated in such films as *Days and Nights in the Forest* (*Aranyer Din Ratri*, 1969), set in the 'swinging' 1960s, *The Middle Man* (*Jana Aranya*, 1976), a tale of Calcutta corruption made during Indira Gandhi's 1975–77 Emergency, and Ray's swansong film, *The Stranger* (*Agantuk*, 1991), set in 1990 but with references to the entire post-Independence period in India.

Gaston Roberge has been writing about Ray and his films for almost four decades. A Jesuit born in Montreal, whose first language is French, he went to India in 1961 and began teaching mass communication and film studies at St Xavier's College in Calcutta, which remains his base. In 1970, with the support of Ray, Roberge founded a media centre named Chitrabani, and a few years later, in 1974, published a book of the same name. In its preface, Ray—not a man to give praise without due cause—described the global film scene of the early 1970s as “one of bewildering complexity”, and complimented the author as follows: “Making his way through the cinematic maze, Gaston Roberge displays admirable patience, eclecticism and clear-headedness” (p. 18).

Satyajit Ray is a collection of fairly short pieces by Roberge published or written in Calcutta between 1970 and 2005, plus one piece specially written for the book. They also include a valuable long interview with Ray published in 1978, transcribed by Roberge in continuous prose, as if it is a piece by Ray, which deals mainly with the process of script-writing. Speaking of his reservations about the prettiness of colour in films, Ray (who originally trained as a fine artist) remarks tellingly: “The trouble is that it's not like paint, and that keeps worrying me” (p. 220).

Most of the pieces concern Ray's films, individually or collectively, both from the point of view of the sympathetic critic and from the angle of the devoted film studies teacher; but a handful focus on the man, whom friends called by the name Manikda. One of the latter, “A quiet friendship with Manikda”, contains an anecdote that sheds a penetrating light on Ray's personality—somewhat like the highly expressive details that enliven Ray's films. As Roberge tells it, during one of his regular Sunday-morning visits to Ray at his flat, he found him slightly preoccupied. An hour before, visitors had left the flat, after examining some of his handwritten screenplays at their own request—and one person had apparently stolen the screenplay of *Charulata*. “I ventured to ask him what action he planned. His reply astonished me: ‘Nothing,’ he said. He briefly explained that he did not want to hurt the reputation of the culprit. I pondered over his humane concern” (p. 22). Sadly, the screenplay was not recovered, as later became apparent during my own research.

Roberge is undoubtedly a humane writer, and this shines through his pieces. For instance, in “Humanism in Ray’s cinema”, an intelligent appraisal of western critics’ decades of labelling of Ray as a ‘humanist’, he comments: “Tenderness as in Renoir, lucidity as in Chekhov and hope as . . . in Ray. These are, I believe, the three main components of Satyajit Ray’s humanism” (p. 191). And while writing perceptively on Ray’s final, heartfelt, but under-appreciated, films about corruption, made after he had suffered severe coronary illness, Roberge brings in an apt New Testament quotation from Jesus—almost the only explicitly religious reference in his collection. It refers to the bleak family drama *Branches of the Tree* (*Sakha Prasakha*, 1990): “I am the true vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut-off from me you can do nothing” (pp. 100–101).

The book has many flaws, however. Some are relatively trivial: typos and grammatical slips, incorrect dates and a persistent reference to the “West Bengal Famine”, despite the fact that the disaster occurred chiefly in East Bengal. Others are more serious. For example, the characters in *Pather Panchali* are described as “peasants” (p. 258), when the family are in fact poor Brahmins who survive by reading the scriptures for the wealthy. The citified Salman Rushdie once made the same mistake, but for Roberge, a student of Ray, there can be little excuse. In another chapter written in 2002, he makes much of a stethoscope as a symbol of the artist’s role in society and claims that an actual stethoscope is seen “only twice in Ray’s oeuvre” (p. 54)—when Apu’s sister Durga is fatally ill in *Pather Panchali* and at the very beginning of *An Enemy of the People* (*Ganasatru*, 1989), Ray’s adaptation of Ibsen’s play about a doctor. Yet in *The Adversary* (*Pratidwandi*, 1970), a masterpiece that Roberge reviews at length in yet another chapter, there is a long scene with a depressed medical student who wears a stethoscope and moodily applies the instrument to his own body.

Ray went to exceptional lengths to be accurate in his films, which is one reason among many for their effortless feeling of real life. Scholars who love his films, such as Roberge, should try to match Ray’s fastidiousness when writing about his oeuvre.

ANDREW ROBINSON
Wolfson College, University of Cambridge

“WE ARE HERE TO STAY”: PASHTUN MIGRANTS IN THE NORTHERN AREAS OF PAKISTAN. By MATTHIAS WEINREICH. pp. 119. Berlin, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2009.
doi:10.1017/S1356186309009857

This book provides insights into Pashtun migrants in Pakistan. Pashtuns (Pashto) are, perhaps, better known as Pathans, the Hindi/Urdu equivalent. It is a case study, paying special attention to the decades following the opening of the Karakoram Highway, in 1978, highlighting problems faced by migrant-settlers, their attempts to maintain their mother-tongue, the linguistic pressures they face in day-to-day situations and language shift. Particularly valuable are the author’s interviews with “ordinary” Pashto-speakers: cobblers, traders, tea boys, farmers and porters.

The book has been organised into four parts. Firstly, the author provides a geographic and socio-linguistic introduction to Pashtun presence in Chitral and Kohistan. Secondly, he provides the impetus for Pashtun migration and their activities in the mid-1990s, connecting the socio-economic development of the area with Pashtun migration.

Thirdly, language contact, language maintenance and language shift of the Pashtuns in Northern Pakistan are considered. Finally, the author makes predictions on Pashtun migration based on its trends in the mid-1990s.