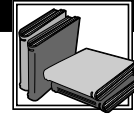


Chapter 35 Biography Activity

Though Indian industrial growth lags behind some of its Asian neighbors (textbook page 902), its film industry is one of the busiest in the world, turning out films in the country's many languages. Many are popular romantic dramas aimed at local audiences, while others are world-famous masterpieces. The most distinguished Indian film-maker, ranked with the world's greatest directors, was Satyajit Ray. ♦ *As you read, think of the ways that films reflect a country's culture. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Satyajit Ray (1921–1992)

For moviegoers throughout the world, the films of Satyajit Ray gave a poetic yet realistic glimpse into Indian life. Born in 1921 into a well-to-do intellectual Bengali family, Ray studied economics at Calcutta University. But he found his real interests while studying painting at the university founded by the poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore. Like Tagore, Ray was talented in many fields, including art and music, bringing them all together in his work. He frequently wrote or collaborated on the scores for his later films.

Ray later said that his years studying at Tagore's school were "when I had most leisure for contemplation, reading, looking at nature and getting to know people. Everything started from that point onwards, my interest in film. . . ." He began working as an art director in an advertising agency. Always interested in films, he helped start the Calcutta Film Society in 1947. While designing the novel *Pather Panchali*, Ray began to think about making it into a film.

The agency sent Ray to London in 1950, giving him a chance to see more films from many countries. The following year, he began work on his own film. For four years, borrowing money and pawning

his books and records, he worked on the production, mostly on weekends. *Pather Panchali* ("Song of the Road") was the first of a trilogy that would make him famous. Ray found a world audience partly with the help of American director John Huston, who showed the film in New York in 1955, even before it was released in Calcutta. Later it amazed viewers at the Cannes Film Festival, establishing him as an international director.

The three films of the "Apu trilogy" are both the story of a young man's growing up and a chronicle of the social changes taking place in India. The films are simple and powerful human dramas of joy and tragedy, beautifully photographed, using many newcomers and nonactors.

The other films in the trilogy are *Aparajito* (1956, "The Unvanquished") and *Apur Sansar* (1959, "The World of Apu"). Ray's later films include *Days and Nights in the Forest* (1969), *The Chess Players* (1977), and *The Home and the World* (1984). Though very ill, Ray finished his final film, *The Visitor*, in 1991. Shortly before his death he was given an honorary Academy Award for lifetime achievement.



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Questions to Think About

1. What was the subject matter of Satyajit Ray's "Apu" trilogy?
2. Besides film-making, what were some of Ray's other talents?
3. **Identifying Central Issues** What qualities do you think a film needs in order to be liked and understood by audiences in different countries?