



SATYAJIT RAY: THE LANGUAGE OF FILM

Two Daughters

Introduced by Aparna Sen

Ray adapted Tagore's short stories to mark the latter's centenary year. In *The Postmaster*, a young lad from the city is sent to a remote village where a young orphan girl is his domestic help. *Samapti* marks Aparna Sen's delightful debut as a tomboy who breaks all rules as a young bride but has a change of heart as she reaches adolescence.

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

A contemporary review

Two Daughters – they were originally three, but one of them, alas, was dropped in transit to make a shorter film – is based on a couple of Tagore stories (*The Postmaster*, *Samapti*) and was made specifically for the centenary of this formidable guru. In describing them as nothing more than *divertimenti* to be enjoyed in the spirit of a Festival, Satyajit Ray has been too modest; for these short stories, though slight, are never trivial. They may be comedies in every sense of the word – but, as in all good comedies, the richness of the humour depends on serious preoccupations. In the light of Ray's recurring themes, *Two Daughters* can be seen as an honourable development; a variation, perhaps, in a new and exquisite key.

Both stories employ similar devices. At first ostensibly about two cultured fellows placed in situations beyond their control, they soon turn out to be mainly concerned with the girls in the case, the girls with whom they are both, in different ways, horribly involved. In the first tale Mr Nanda, a Calcutta poet paying his way as a postmaster, is transferred to a steaming outback depot – to what turns out to be his speedy detriment. Jungle life quickly wears him down. His nerves are shattered by the antics of a preying lunatic, by the music of local amateurs, and by a severe bout of malaria. Hastily he resigns from the postal service and returns to Calcutta; but in doing so he fails a little servant-girl whom he has been teaching the rudiments of writing. This orphan – the film's real protagonist – stands in for all the underprivileged in their hopeless bravery; and Nanda's betrayal of the girl's hopes (for it is no less) represents just as much the failure of the hypersensitive man to transform a desperate situation. This play of heroism against understandable cowardice is beautifully caught in the final scene, as Nanda slinks away from the depot. The girl passes him, and as he offers her a rupee she proudly ignores him. In long shot they turn and look back at each other – he dressed in city clothes, she burdened by a huge pail of water. Then Nanda ambles on. By the side of the path the lunatic slumps stiffly.

This poignant affair surprisingly gives Ray a free hand for a most delicate humour, in which the incongruity of civilised man in far from civilised surroundings is exploited, with tact, to the full. Nanda's first encounter with the lunatic is hilarious, and his embarrassment at collapsing furniture, at the ceaseless drone of the musicians, could win the admiration of even M. Hulot. *The Postmaster* is a fine piece of work: if it weren't flawed by Ray's usual cliché of a storm at a moment of crisis, it would be a masterpiece.

Samapti is sharper and brisker; a comedy of love, in fact, conveyed in what is a generally taut narrative. Again we have the sensitive and scholarly hero: a young law student, home for the holidays, who is self-centred, vain and well-intentioned in much the same way as Mr Nanda. His mother wants him to marry, and has indeed chosen a girl; but naturally he doesn't look at the matter in the same light. He tells her that he's attracted to a tomboy graced by the name of Puglee, and she is horrified. Puglee, she cries out, is a shrew, wild, impossible ... The marriage, nevertheless, is arranged. The girl doesn't want to marry, but conventions in Bengal being what they are, she has to go through with it. Eventually, though, it is all too much for her; and on her wedding night she rebels. She refuses to sleep with her husband and slips out of the house into the dark, through fields to the river, to her childhood toys – to a squirrel in a cage, a ruined shrine, a swing. When the mother discovers that the marriage hasn't been consummated, a scandal of absurd proportions breaks out – she wails and slaps the girl, neighbours are delightedly shocked, and the ineffectual young man slips sadly into the garden. Puglee, in the meantime, is locked away in his room, where she responds by smashing up its contents.

From here on, Ray (and Tagore) could have developed the tale along the usual lines of tragedy or comedy, of *The Doll's House* or *The Taming of the Shrew*. The road they take, however, is not so straightforward. With subtle poise, never missing a step, they move the story along the most curious of paths to a satisfying conclusion. This balance is the making of *Samapti*: the droll waywardness of the formal tea party, reminiscent of Chekhov at his best, could easily have run out of hand; and the pathos of Puglee's forced marriage could have likewise too easily turned into a lugubrious *drame à thèse*. Ray's resourcefulness is always matched by restraint.

The acting, too, is masterly. Aparna das Gupta, as Puglee, has wit, range and a glowing, mercurial beauty. Soumitra Chatterji, who played Apu in the third part of the trilogy, here shows a dab hand at characterisation: his scholar is all elbows and spectacles, a rare little portrait of amiable vanity. And around them the mother and neighbours frolic, as scatter-brained and real a company as one could hope for. *Samapti* makes a delightful and appropriate conclusion to a film which deserves the widest circulation.

Eric Rhode, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1961

TWO DAUGHTERS

Director: Satyajit Ray

Production Company: Satyajit Ray Productions

Producer: Satyajit Ray *

Associate Producer: Amiyanath Mukherji

Production Manager: Anil Chowdhury

Screenplay: Satyajit Ray

Based on stories by: Rabindranath Tagore

Photography: Soumendu Roy

Editor: Dulal Dutta

Art Director: Bansi Chandragupta

Music: Satyajit Ray

Sound: Durgadas Mitra

Restored by the Satyajit Ray Preservation Project through a collaboration of the Academy Film Archive, the Merchant-Ivory Foundation, the Film Foundation, and the Packard Humanities Institute. Print courtesy of the Academy Film Archive.

Teen Kanya (Three Daughters), including the episode 'Monihara', will be presented in August.

Cast

The Postmaster

Anil Chatterjee (*Nanda, the postmaster*)

Chandana Banerjee (*Ratan*)

Nripati Chatterjee (*Bisay*)

Khagen Pathak (*Khagen*)

Gopal Roy (*Bilash*)

Samapti (The Conclusion)

Soumitra Chatterjee (*Amulya*)

Aparna das Gupta [Aparna Sen] (*Mrinmoyee, 'Puglee'*)

Sita Mukherjee (*Jogmaya*)

Gita Dey (*Nistarini*)

Santosh Dutta (*Kisori*)

Mihir Chakravarti (*Rakha*)

Devi Neogy (*Haripada*)

India 1961

112 mins

* Uncredited

SATYAJIT RAY

THE LANGUAGE OF FILM

The Philosopher's Stone (Parash Pathar)

Fri 1 Jul 20:35; Sun 10 Jul 18:20

The Zoo Chiriyakhana

Sat 2 Jul 12:00; Sun 10 Jul 12:20

The Adversary (Pratidwandi)

Sat 2 Jul 15:10; Sun 10 Jul 15:30

Pather Panchali (Song of the Little Road)

Sun 3 Jul 18:20; Sat 9 Jul 12:00; Sat 30 Jul 14:30

The Film Language of Satyajit Ray

Wed 6 Jul 18:00

The Middleman (Jana Aranya)

Wed 6 Jul 20:20; Sun 24 Jul 18:10

Two Daughters: The Postmaster and Samapti (The Conclusion)

+ intro by Aparna Sen

Thu 7 Jul 17:50

The Unvanquished (Aparajito)

Sat 9 Jul 15:00; Thu 14 Jul 18:15; Sat 30 Jul 17:40

The World of Apu (Apu Sansar)

Sat 9 Jul 17:50; Sat 16 Jul 20:45; Sat 30 Jul 20:30

+ pre-recorded intro

Raahgir (The Wayfarers)

Mon 11 Jul 18:00

Company Limited (Seemabaddha)

Wed 13 Jul 18:20; Tue 26 Jul 20:45

Satyajit Ray: His Home and the World

Sat 16 Jul 12:00-17:00

Satyajit Ray Documentaries Programme 1: Rabindranath Tagore

+ The Inner Eye + Sukumar Ray

Sat 16 Jul 18:30; Sun 31 Jul 12:00

The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha Goopy (Gyne ar Bagha Byne)

Sun 17 Jul 13:00; Sat 23 Jul 12:10

The Golden Fortress (Sonar Kella)

Sun 17 Jul 15:40; Wed 27 Jul 18:00

Branches of the Tree (Shakha Proshakha)

Sun 17 Jul 18:10; Sat 30 Jul 12:20

The Kingdom of Diamonds (Hirak Rajar Deshe)

Mon 18 Jul 18:10; Sat 23 Jul 14:50

Joi Baba Felunath (The Elephant God)

Tue 19 Jul 18:10; Mon 25 Jul 20:40

The Stranger (Agantuk)

Thu 21 Jul 20:40; Sun 31 Jul 18:20

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