



SATYAJIT RAY THE LANGUAGE OF FILM

Teen Kanya (Three Daughters)

To mark Tagore's centenary year, Ray adapted three short stories by the writer. In *The Postmaster*, a young man from Calcutta arrives as postmaster of a small village and soon forms a bond with an orphan girl. In *Monihara*, the spirit of a man's dead wife wanders their house in search of her lost jewels. *Samapti* marks Aparna Sen's delightful debut as a teenage tomboy who experiences a change of heart after rejecting her new husband.

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A contemporary review

(Teen Kanya means 'Three Daughters', but the third story, *Monihara*, was cut by Ray himself when the film was first sent to this country.)

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 Chekov 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

TEEN KANYA (THREE 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 three stories by: Rabindranath Tagore

Photography: Soumendu Roy

Editor: Dulal Dutta

Art Director: Bansi Chandragupta

Music: Satyajit Ray

Sound: Durgadas Mitra

Cast

The Postmaster

Anil Chatterjee (*Nandalal, the postmaster*)

Chandana Banerjee (*Ratan*)

Nripati Chatterjee (*Bisay*)

Khagen Pathak (*Khagen*)

Gopal Roy (*Bilash*)

Monihara (The Lost Jewels)

Kali Bannerjee (*Phanibhusan Saha*)

Kanika Majumdar (*Manimalika*)

Kumar Roy (*Madhusudhan*)

Gobinda Chakravarti (*schoolmaster/narrator*)

Samapti (The Conclusion)

Soumitra Chatterjee (*Amulya*)

Aparna Das Gupta (*Mrinmoyee*)

Sita Mukherjee (*Jogmaya*)

Gita Dey (*Nistarini*)

Santosh Dutta (*Kisori*)

Mihir Chakravarti (*Rakhal*)

Devi Neogy (*Haripada*)

India 1961

178 mins

* Uncredited

Print courtesy of the Academy Film Archive.

Teen Kanya: 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.

Monihara: Restored by the Satyajit Ray Preservation Project at the Academy Film.

To clarify, *Teen Kanya / Monihara, The Expedition, The Chess Players, Sikkim*, and *Two*, all screening in the Satyajit Ray season in August, are advertised as restorations from the Academy Film Archive but they are not brand new restorations and are now showing slight signs of wear and tear. We apologise for any disappointment caused.

SATYAJIT RAY THE LANGUAGE OF FILM

The Music Room (Jalsaghar)

Mon 1 Aug 20:40; Sun 14 Aug 18:15

Charulata (The Lonely Wife)

Fri 5 Aug 18:20; Mon 8 Aug 18:15; Mon 15 Aug 14:30; Wed 17 Aug 20:40;

Sat 27 Aug 12:00; Wed 31 Aug 20:45

Devi (The Goddess) + Pikoo

Sat 6 Aug 14:30 (+ pre-recorded intro by Sharmila Tagore); Sun 14 Aug 14:45

Teen Kanya (Three Daughters)

Sun 7 Aug 17:35; Sat 13 Aug 14:50

Kanchenjunga

Tue 9 Aug 18:20; Mon 15 Aug 20:50

The Expedition (Abhijan)

Wed 10 Aug 20:10; Sat 20 Aug 14:30

Kapurush (The Coward) + Mahapurush (The Holy Man)

Thu 11 Aug 18:00; Sat 20 Aug 20:20

Satyajit Ray Documentaries Programme 2

Tue 16 Aug 20:40; Wed 24 Aug 18:20

The Hero (Nayak)

Wed 17 Aug 18:10; Thu 25 Aug 20:40

Days and Nights in the Forest (Aranyer Din Ratri)

Thu 18 Aug 18:15; Sat 27 Aug 14:40

The Home and the World (Ghare Baire)

Sun 21 Aug 17:50; Wed 24 Aug 20:20

The Chess Players (Shatranj Ke Khilari)

Tue 23 Aug 18:10 (+ pre-recorded intro by Shabana Azmi); Sun 28 Aug 14:40

Distant Thunder (Ashani Sanket) + Deliverance (Sadgati)

Sat 27 Aug 17:30; Mon 29 Aug 14:40

Enemy of the People (Ganashatru)

Sun 28 Aug 12:10; Tue 30 Aug 18:15 (+ intro by Ashvin Devasundaram)

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