



SATYAJIT RAY: THE LANGUAGE OF FILM

The Home and the World (Ghare Baire)

In the chaotic aftermath of the disastrous 1905 partition of Bengal into Muslim and Hindu states, progressive landlord Nikhilesh finds his wife Bimala's attentions stolen by his more passionate and charismatic revolutionary friend Sandip. But events soon overtake them and Bimla is faced with deciding her future. A beautiful, nuanced period drama, it was completed by Ray, with his son's help, following two massive heart attacks.

bfi.org.uk

Satyajit Ray on 'The Home and the World'

When Satyajit Ray started shooting his film *Ghare Baire*, based on Rabindranath Tagore's novel and called *The Home and the World* in English, it was the final fulfilment of an old dream. He had wanted to make the Tagore novel about upper middle-class life in Bengal as his first film, some years before *Pather Panchali* surprised the 1956 Cannes Festival. He was prevented then, after writing a scenario, by his refusal to compromise with the commercial producers of the day and the fact that there was anyway much difficulty in casting it.

Ray says that it was perhaps a good thing that he was not able to make the film when he was a young man. His script, when he looked at it again, was not a good one and he tore it up and started again. 'It's a story that really had to be filmed very strong and very moving. Like the Premchand story [*Deliverance*], it still holds good. And I do want to go back to Tagore from time to time because he was after all, a great master. Besides, I love to do research on the past, to get things absolutely right. There are three central figures in the film, and the first of them is a zamindar who lives in a small town quite happily with his wife. He is a very liberal man but these were the days when women were kept in purdah and he regrets it. He believes his wife has to meet other men, if only to understand him better. Perhaps he also feels that anyway it is likely to be to his advantage. At first his wife says no, she is perfectly happy with him. Then she agrees.

'The film is set during the time when the British had decided to divide and rule the Hindu and Muslim communities, particularly in West Bengal and amid the political confusion, a friend of the zamindar arrives at the village as his guest. He is a leader of the nationalist movement and intends to address the local community in the zamindar's palace. The wife hears him from behind the curtains and afterwards her husband arranges a meeting. That is how she comes out of seclusion and then it is a case of an eternal triangle.

'The zamindar is introverted and quiet, the leader dynamic. There is a total contrast between them. And the leader's attraction for the wife is also a matter of exploiting her. "We need women like you," he says and proceeds to use her for his own ends. What becomes clear is that he is a hollow man and as riots break out and the situation gets out of control the zamindar knows that he should have told his friend to leave. But he doesn't, because he wants

his wife to find out for herself. Eventually she realises her mistake, and the husband goes out to face the people. In a way, he is almost a spokesman for Tagore himself – a well-meaning man who digs his own grave. And the story, though very ironical, really has no moral unless it be that individual wisdom has very little value when it comes to political upheaval.

‘Predominantly, I suppose, the film is a love story set against a stormy political background. I have stuck to history as much as possible and the scale is fairly big. There is, for instance, an ornate and large set. The story is told in the form of diaries in the original novel and I have amplified that idea. The film is in four sections, each with a different style and told from a different point of view. The first section is as the wife sees it, the second moves to the husband’s view, the third to the political leader’s and the last to my own. My section is most like the normal, relatively impersonal narrative. It is all quite fascinating to do and rather difficult. But the story is a challenge in itself, and I’m merely adding my own to it.’

Is the film’s political theme relevant to today? ‘No, but I think it is important to understand it just the same. It is important in our present confused situation to make films of classics, just to inform people of what happened. And what happened was really quite simple. These were Hindu landlords in a predominantly Muslim area, and the political leader, unlike the zamindar, does not think that Muslims are part of India. He is fomenting trouble between the two communities. But, more than that, he is calling for a nationalist movement that would react against the British. It was primarily a movement based on the middle classes and calling for such things as the wearing of specifically Indian clothes, which was absurd because there was often no substitute in the shops. It was bound first to cause trouble and then to peter out.

‘But this is not really a political film. It is about people first, like all my films. How can you make a political film without them? Not very well. My next project, however, is more in that line. It will be the first story to be filmed from the work of Mahasweta Devi, one of India’s best novelists and a niece, incidentally, of Ritwik Ghatak, the Bengali director. She is understandably obsessed with exploitation, particularly of tribals. And that, rather like *Sadgati*, is what the film will be about. But its tone will be different, since the writer’s style is very different from that of Premchand. I have always tried to be faithful to the writers I adapt, to achieve the quality of their writing within the film. It doesn’t mean that everything has to be the same. But the tone has to be right, and the purpose behind the story must be similar.’

Derek Malcolm, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1982

THE HOME AND THE WORLD (GHARE BAIRE)

Director: Satyajit Ray
Production Company: National Film Development Corporation
Production Manager: Anil Chowdhury
Special Assistant: Sandip Ray
Assistant Directors: Ranesh Sen, Shanti Chatterji, Subrata Lahiri
Screenplay: Satyajit Ray
From the novel by: Rabindranath Tagore
Director of Photography: Soumendu Roy
Editor: Dulal Dutta
Art Director: Asok Bose
Costume Designer: Haru Das
Make-up: Ananta Das
Opticals: Prasad Film Laboratory
Music: Satyajit Ray
Songs Performed by: Kishore Kumar
Sound Recording: Robin Sen Gupta, Jyoti Chatterjee, Anup Mukherjee
Sound Re-recording: Mangesh Desai

Cast

Soumitra Chatterjee (*Sandip*)
Victor Banerjee (*Nikhilesh*)
Swatilekha Chatterjee (*Bimala*)
Gopa Aich (*Nikhilesh’s sister-in-law*)
Jennifer Kapoor (*Miss Gilby, English governess*)
Manoj Mitra (*headmaster*)
Indrapramit Roy (*Amulya*)
Bimal Chatterjee (*Kulada*)

India 1984
140 mins

Print courtesy of the Packard Humanities Institute Collection at the Academy Film Archive.

SATYAJIT RAY**THE LANGUAGE OF FILM****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

Satyajit Ray Documentaries Programme 2

Wed 24 Aug 18:20

The Hero (Nayak)

Thu 25 Aug 20:40

Charulata (The Lonely Wife)

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

Days and Nights in the Forest (Aranyer Din Ratri)

Sat 27 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)

In association with The Academy Film Archive



Don't miss: **Beyond Bollywood – The Musical**

Peacock Theatre, 24 Aug – 3 Sep 2022

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](https://www.bfi.org.uk/join)

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

The British Film Institute is a charity registered in England and Wales No. 287780