



**SATYAJIT RAY: THE LANGUAGE OF FILM**

# **An Enemy of the People (Ganashatru)**

*Introduced by Ashvin Devasundaram (Tuesday 30 August only)*

A late masterpiece, produced while Ray was ill, this biting drama sees a doctor fighting religious bigotry when he discovers that temple water is contaminated and people are falling ill. Soumitra Chatterjee's Everyman attempts to take a stand, but soon finds the entire town turning against him. Adapting Ibsen's play, Ray made this film at a time when Hindu right-wing sentiments were on the rise and religion was blindly embraced. It's message remains just as relevant today.

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Satyajit Ray has been quite seriously ill. He admits to two heart attacks (his wife, Bijoya, says three) and has had a heart bypass operation at Houston, Texas. This is why for five years his doctors have forbidden him to work on a feature film. Asked what made him choose his own free adaptation of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* – 'Ganashatru' means 'public enemy' in Bengali – he replies: 'My cardiologist.'

The fact is that the whole film could be shot at Indrapuri Studios, fairly near Ray's home in Calcutta, where at all times there was an ambulance on the premises. Each day, the doctors were there on the set to monitor Ray's pulse and blood pressure; though it seemed, when I was there, that they were as much interested in the shooting as in their distinguished patient's health, and were very proud of the fact that he had consulted them about the medical matters contained in the film. Certainly, though working a short day, starting at eleven in the morning and usually ending around four in the afternoon, Ray showed no sign whatsoever of strain. He seemed immensely happy to be back at work after five long years away and, as usual, in total command of everything.

He had written the screenplay himself and had already thought about much of the music he would use. And though his son, Sandip, was operating the camera – again because the doctors told him not to do the job himself – Ray left no one in any doubt that he was fully in charge. What has helped him complete the shooting so quickly, he says, is the professionalism of the cast, hand-picked and led by Soumitra Chatterjee, an actor who has now appeared in no fewer than 13 Ray films, as the Bengali version of Dr Stockman.

Chatterjee confides that, at the beginning of the first day's shooting, he was very worried indeed: 'He seemed uncertain and hesitant – not at all like his old self. But as soon as we really got into the work, all his old energy seemed to return. It was wonderful to see the effect of the filmmaking process upon him. It completely revitalised him. Even his doctors, who are pretty cautious people, say it is as good as jogging for him. We are all so glad he is back. It is such a privilege working for him.'

Ray himself says: 'I must say I never thought I would enjoy shooting something so dependent on words quite so much. Today, for instance, we have managed to get six minutes done – we were supposed to do three or four at most. So we are well in advance and even under budget. The reason is, of course, that I have such a magnificent cast – all highly skilled

professionals. I have often used amateurs, as you know. And they can be wonderful. But there is no doubt that you can move faster with such skilled people around. We communicate with each other so easily. Take Soumitra, for instance. He knows exactly what I want, and I only have to raise an eyebrow for him to alter his performance a little. Of course, it is absolutely a two-way process. I make suggestions to him and he makes them to me. It is the same with everybody. I go with a screenplay and a shooting plan that is fully prepared but I try never to be inflexible. You simply have to change your plans occasionally, and you must receive new ideas wherever they come from.'

Ray adds that he chose the Ibsen play because of its total relevance today, particularly in India. But the adaptation is clearly not slavish. There are few of Ibsen's actual lines in the script. 'I made several versions as I went along and, as I changed my own work, it became a little more unlike the original. Now I sometimes forget about Ibsen altogether. For instance, I have given rather larger parts to the doctor's wife and daughter – they are fleshed out much more than in the play. And there are other significant changes too.'

As for the style of the film, Ray says that though *An Enemy of the People* is restricted to the studio, it will not be in any way theatrical. 'We're dealing with words, words, words. It is, in a way, a chamber piece. But, of course, we are using the camera as intelligently as possible. I can no longer be my own camera operator, but Sandip is a very good one indeed and our director of photography is Barun Raha, who is an expert too. He used to look after Subrata Mitra's cameras, so he had the best of training. We are trying to make the film as interesting as possible cinematically and not too enclosed in feeling. But the words and the acting are all important. I can't speak for the former, of course, but I can for the latter, and I am absolutely confident of that.'

'Needless to say, the look of the film will not really be very much changed from the rest of my work in essence. Unfortunately, I am still a classicist. I can't tell my stories in the new way. It just wouldn't fit. I still do things roughly the same way. I keep the time for editing between shooting. I like to do it as I go along, which some people might find unorthodox.'

'I've had excellent co-operation from the National Film Development Corporation, who also produced *The Home and the World*. They've given me everything I want. But they were anxious for the film to be in competition at Cannes and I was not. I'm a bit too old for that sort of thing now. I just want the film to be seen!

'As for audiences, I hope they will find the film completely contemporary in tone and spirit. It's an urgent message now, isn't it? Pollution is on everybody's lips, and not just in India. So I'm not exactly making an art film. But then I never thought of my films as art films. They are just films.'

'Sometimes I have the feeling that one or two of our younger directors think of art too much, and of their audiences too little. I don't go to the cinema much nowadays – they are so bad in Calcutta except for the new Film Centre and Sandip has fixed up a video recorder at home for me. But I used to go quite a lot, and to my own films too. I used to watch the audience as much as the screen. And if they didn't laugh in the right places or seemed to have the wrong reaction, I never thought of it as their fault but as mine. I hadn't succeeded in getting my point over well enough. That's a lesson I think quite a lot of our younger directors ought to learn. You must think of your audience. You must communicate.'

**Derek Malcolm, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1989**

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## AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE (GANASHATRU)

*Director:* Satyajit Ray  
*Production Company:* National Film Development Corporation  
*Executive Producer:* Ravi Malik  
*Screenplay:* Satyajit Ray  
*Based on the play by:* Henrik Ibsen  
*Director of Photography:* Barun Raha  
*Camera Operator:* Sandip Ray  
*Editor:* Dulal Dutta  
*Art Director:* Asok Bose  
*Make-up:* Ananta Das  
*Music:* Satyajit Ray  
*Sound Recording:* Sujit Sarkar

## Cast

Soumitra Chatterjee (*Dr Asok Gupta*)  
Ruma Guha Thakurta (*Maya Gupta, Asok's wife*)  
Mamata Shankar (*Indrani Gupta, Asok's daughter*)  
Dhritiman Chatterjee (*Nisith Gupta*)  
Dipankar Dey (*Haridas Bagchi*)  
Subhendu Chatterjee (*Bires*)  
Manoj Mitra (*Adhir Mukherjee*)  
Viswa Guha Thakurta (*Ranen Haldar*)  
Rajaram Yagnik (*Bhargava*)  
Satya Banerjee (*Manmatha*)  
Gobinda Mukherjee (*Chandan*)

India 1989  
100 mins

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## SATYAJIT RAY THE LANGUAGE OF FILM

### Enemy of the People (Ganashatru)

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

### The Chess Players (Shatranj Ke Khilari)

Sun 28 Aug 14:40

### Distant Thunder (Ashani Sanket) + Deliverance (Sadgati)

Mon 29 Aug 14:40 Charulata (The Lonely Wife)

Wed 31 Aug 20:45

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