



Pather Panchali (Song of the Little Road)

Director: Satyajit Ray

Production Company: Government of West Bengal

Screenplay: Satyajit Ray

Based on the novel by: Bibhutibhusan Banerjee

Director of Photography: Subrata Mitra

Editor: Dulal Dutta

Art Director: Bansi Chandragupta

Music: Ravi Shankar

Sound: Bhupen Ghosh

Cast:

Kanu Banerjee (*Harihar, the father*)

Karuna Banerjee (*Sarbajaya, the mother*)

Subir Banerjee (*Apu, the son*)

Uma Das Gupta (*the older Durga*)

Chunibala Devi (*Indira Thakrun*)

Runki Banerjee (*the younger Durga*)

Reba Devi (*Seja Thakrun*)

Aparna Devi (*Nilmoni's wife*)

Tulsi Chakravarti (*Prasanna, the schoolteacher*)

Binoy Mukherjee (*Baidyanath Majumdar*)

Haren Banerjee (*Chinibash, the sweets seller*)

Harimohan Nag (*doctor*)

Haridhan Nag (*Chakravarti*)

Nibhanoni Devi (*Dasi*)

Ksiroth Roy (*priest*)

Roma Ganguli (*Roma*)

India 1955

125 mins

Digital 4K (restoration)

POWER TO THE PEOPLE: HORACE OVÉ'S RADICAL VISION

Horace Ové: Reflecting the People – A Career

Retrospective + panel and Q&A with actor Lennie James, producers Annabelle Alcazar, Peter Ansoorge, Tara Prem and Marcus Ryder, chaired by Samira Ahmed

Mon 23 Oct 18:00

Playing Away

Tue 24 Oct 18:10 (+ intro by writer Caryl Phillips);

Tue 21 Nov 20:45

The Black Safari + intro by director Colin Luke +

Skateboard Kings

Sat 28 Oct 15:15

James Baldwin and the 'N' Word: Baldwin's

N**** + Q&A with author Colin Grant and additional guests (tbc)

Sat 4 Nov 14:10

King Carnival + intro by Michael La Rose, George

Padmore Institute + **Reggae**

Tue 7 Nov 18:00

Play for Today: A Hole in Babylon + **Play for**

Today: The Garland Shai Mala Khani

Sun 12 Nov 15:00

Dabbawallahs + pre-recorded intro by producer

Annabelle Alcazar + **Who Shall We Tell?**

Fri 24 Nov 18:00

POWER TO THE PEOPLE: HORACE OVÉ'S RADICAL VISION

Pather Panchali

Ray's celebrated debut presents the struggles of a rural Bengali family with an intimacy, compassion and profound humanism that announced a major new voice in world cinema. It mirrors the commitment Horace Ové had to depicting real life experience while imbuing it with cinematic poetry. It also draws on Horace Ové's background in Trinidad and its South Asian cultural influences.

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Satyajit Ray on 'Pather Panchali'

I remember the first day's shooting of *Pather Panchali* very well. It was in the festive season, in October, and the last of the big *pujas* was taking place that day. Our location was 75 miles away from Calcutta. As our taxi sped along the Grand Trunk Road, we passed through several suburban towns and villages and heard the drums and even had fleeting glimpses of some images. Someone said it would bring us luck. I had my doubts, but I wished to believe it. All who set about making films need luck as much as they need the other things: talent, money, perseverance and so on. We needed a little more of it than most.

I knew this first day was really a sort of rehearsal for us, to break us in, as it were. For most of us it was a start from scratch. There were eight on our unit of whom only one – Bansi, the art director – had previous professional experience. We had a new cameraman, Subrata, and an old, much-used Wall camera which happened to be the only one available for hire on that particular day. Its one discernible advantage seemed to be a device to insure smoothness of panning. We had no sound equipment, as the scene was to be a silent one.

It was an episode in the screenplay where the two children of the story, brother and sister, stray from their village and chance upon a field of *kaash* flowers. The two have had a quarrel, and here in this enchanted setting they are reconciled and their long journey is rewarded by their first sight of a railway train. I chose to begin with this scene because on paper it seemed both effective and simple. I considered this important, because the idea behind launching the production with only 8,000 rupees in the bank was to produce quickly and cheaply a reasonable length of rough cut which we hoped would establish our bonafides, the lack of which had so far stood in the way of our getting a financier.

At the end of the first day's shooting we had eight shots. The children behaved naturally, which was a bit of luck because I had not tested them. As for myself, I remember feeling a bit strung up in the beginning; but as work progressed my nerves relaxed and in the end I even felt a kind of elation. However, the scene was only half finished, and on the following Sunday we were back on the same location. But was it the same location? It was hard to believe it. What was on the previous occasion a sea of fluffy whiteness was now a mere expanse of uninspiring brownish grass. We knew *kaash* was a seasonal flower, but surely they were not that short-lived? A local peasant provided the explanation. The flowers, he said, were food to the cattle. The cows and buffaloes had come to graze the day before and had literally chewed up the scenery.

HORACE OVÉ: FILM INFLUENCES

Pather Panchali

Wed 18 Oct 20:35; Mon 30 Oct 17:50; Tue 14 Nov 14:30

Seniors' Free Matinee: La dolce vita + intro

Mon 23 Oct 14:00

Bicycle Thieves Ladri di biciclette

Tue 14 Nov 18:20; Sun 19 Nov 18:40; Fri 24 Nov 20:45

With special thanks to the Ové family for all their guidance and support for this season

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This was a big setback. We knew of no other *kaash* field that would provide the long shots that I needed. This meant staging the action in a different setting, and the very thought was heart-breaking. Who would have known then that we would be back on the identical location exactly two years later and indulge in the luxury of re-shooting the entire scene with the same cast and the same unit but with money provided by the Government of West Bengal.

When I look back on the making of *Pather Panchali*, I cannot be sure whether it has meant more pain to me than pleasure. It is difficult to describe the peculiar torments of a production held up for lack of funds. The long periods of enforced idleness (there were two gaps totalling a year and a half) produce nothing but the deepest gloom. The very sight of the scenario is sickening, let alone thoughts of embellishing it with details, or brushing up the dialogue.

But even a day's work has rewards, not the least of which is the gradual comprehension of the complex and fascinating nature of filmmaking itself. The edicts of the theorists learned assiduously over the years doubtless perform some useful function at the back of your mind, but grappling with the medium in a practical way for the first time, you realise (a) that you know rather less about it than you thought you did; (b) that the theorists provide all the answers and (c) that your approach should not derive from Dovzhenko's *Earth*, however much you may love that dance in the moonlight, but from the earth, the soil, of your own country – assuming, of course, that your story has its roots in it.

Bibhutibhusan Banerjee's *Pather Panchali* was serialised in a popular Bengali magazine in the early 1930s. The author had been brought up in a village and the book contained much that was autobiographical. The manuscript had been turned down by the publishers on the ground that it lacked a story. The magazine, too, was initially reluctant to accept it, but later did so on condition that it would be discontinued if the readers so wished. But the story of Apu and Durga was a hit from the first instalment. The book, published a year or so later, was an outstanding critical and popular success and has remained on the best-seller list ever since.

I chose *Pather Panchali* for the qualities that made it a great book: humanism, lyricism and its ring of truth. I knew I would have to do a lot of pruning and reshaping – I certainly could not go beyond the first half, which ended with the family's departure for Banaras – but at the same time I felt that to cast the thing into a mould of cut-and-dried narrative would be wrong. The script had to retain some of the rambling quality of the novel because that in itself contained a clue to the feel of authenticity: life in a poor Bengali village does ramble.

Satyajit Ray, 'A Long Time on the Little Road', *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1957