



The Cinema of Ray: A Humanistic Rendition of Childhood

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Abstract

Any discourse on childhood entails a quintessentially humanist consideration of life and experience, a retrospective glance at what was, with a pang lurking from behind all sensibilities as to how things have come to be now – a memory of innocence, now endangered due to various complex processes of circumstances and relationships that have eventually influenced life and have been influenced by it. Yet, the condition of childhood continues to be a vulnerable point in time when a child needs care and attention to grow up to be a worthy man of the future. In this paper I would talk about the representation of childhood through the moving images – the cinema – a medium that may be said to have brought childhood to us in a way that we, more often than not, are able to reach out to the ‘good old days’ and, in the process, cherish the bygone reality. The film has emerged to be an efficacious medium not only of representation but of communication as well between the filmmaker and the audience, much in the manner of that between a writer of literature and his/her reader though not in an entirely identical sense. When the images appeal to our visual sense, we are ‘made able’ to recognize and relate to the eventualities appearing before us in a way that we begin to relive the once-lived experiences that nostalgically constitute a part of our life. A cinematic representation of the child impels the viewer to visualize the past when he/she, as a child, was perhaps a different human being altogether – different from his/her grown-up, conscious, mature, and even complex and gendered self. A question that may arise here is that, do children always require to be considered only as ‘children’? Do they always need to be thought of as ‘vulnerable’ and, hence, necessarily ‘gullible’, epithets that are almost unexceptionally associated with the condition of being a child? These questions have most certainly urged me to explore the representations of the child in the cinema of a man who used the medium to lend an indelible expression to the human cause, thereby championing it through his works – the artist of a magnitudinal height, Satyajit Ray. A very interesting feature that characterizes Ray’s portrayal of the child in films is that he significantly restrains himself from ‘patronizing’ children in any way or considering them as having ‘limited intelligence’. He did not believe in offering them ‘kids’ stuff’ since that is not always what they desire to see and have. A child’s intelligence needs to be respected and Ray offered him with situations that required some bit of critical and analytical thinking, along with making ethical judgements, even on his (the child’s) part. He did not dish out to the young materials that are conventionally made use of to be, in their turn, blindly and uncritically taken for the sake of ‘childish’ pleasure. The essence of education and a healthy development of the mind is what his films are imbued with thereby implicitly, yet palpably, rejecting the convention of conceiving children as being mere ‘sponges’ who could easily be moulded and silenced with superficial elements of commercial entertainment designed for them. In this study, I would consider three of Ray’s feature films – *Sonar Kella* (‘The Golden Fortress’, 1974), *Joy Baba Felunath* (‘The Elephant God’, 1979) and *Phatikchand* (1983) along with two short films entitled ‘Two’, that he made in the year 1964 as a part of a trilogy of short films from India that were commissioned by the US Public Television, and *Pikoor Diary* (‘Pikoo’s Diary’, 1980) – in an attempt to show how the master filmmaker took up the theme of childhood, without taking advantage of the child’s ‘supposed’ immaturity but rather, with a recognition of his (the child’s) needs and potentialities and respect for his innocence that needs to be nurtured and not exploited.

Keywords: Childhood, Film, Humanism, Ray, Representation.

Introduction

His (Ray) films show by their very language that for him, strictly, cinema is a ‘matter of ethics’. They speak (...) of the nostalgia for lost purity, which art alone can recover in the very moment when it expresses it. How not to see that the Calcutta master is first of all a great moralist?¹

Any discourse on childhood, whether cinematic or non-cinematic, entails a quintessentially humanist consideration of life and experience, a retrospective glance at what was, with a pang lurking from all sensibilities as to how things have come to be now – a memory of innocence, now endangered due to various complex processes of circumstances and relationships that have eventually influenced life and have been influenced by it.

Yet, the condition of childhood continues to be a vulnerable point in time when a child needs care and attention to evolve as a mature human being. The medium of the moving images has always been uniquely responsive to the nuances of the inner world of a child and the experiences that he gains as a part of a social reality outside his own self. Given the stark dynamicity of the medium itself, cinema, at different points of time, portrayed childhood in its myriad manifestations in a way that may be said to have brought childhood to us in a way that we, more often than not, are able to reach out to the cherished bygone reality. The film has perceptibly emerged as an efficacious medium not only of representation but of communication as well between the filmmaker and the audience much in the manner of that between a writer of literature and his/her reader, though not in an entirely identical sense. When the images appeal to our visual sense, we are 'made able' to recognize and relate to the eventualities appearing before us in a way that we begin to relive the once-lived experiences that nostalgically constitute a part of our life. A cinematic representation of the child impels the viewer to visualize the past when the latter, as a child, was perhaps a different human being altogether – different from his/her grown-up, conscious, mature, and even complex and gendered self. A whole array of questions that may, in this context, come to mind are: Do children always require to be considered only as 'children'? Do they always need to be thought of as 'vulnerable' and, hence, necessarily 'gullible', epithets that are almost unexceptionally associated with the condition of being a child? These questions have most certainly urged me to explore the representations of the child in the cinema of a man who used the medium to lend an indelible expression to the human cause, thereby championing it through his works – the artist of a magnitudinal height, Satyajit Ray. Gaston Roberge makes a remarkable comment on Ray's idea of humanism:

Ray was not committed to a system of thought, however sublime. He was himself. And before being a humanist – if he was – he was profoundly humane. His humaneness – not just humanness – was marked by sympathy, compassion, mercy, and love¹.

The very enterprise of art, at all times, has had an ameliorative objective. It represents the general with the help of the particular and, yet, it remains wholly aesthetic. Ray was conscious that this 'aesthetic activity which is essential to the welfare of the human mind' cannot be reduced to 'political, pragmatic activity'¹. The challenge that Ray took up was to reach the universal 'in and through' the 'particular circumstances' – a task he achieves so subtly and humanely. The most important point here that can seldom be missed is that the 'task facing Ray required intelligence' and, hence, 'the result was bound to be interesting'¹. The essence of the human is asserted in each of his films with due delicateness and mature artistry. His humanism, as Gaston Roberge points out, 'consists in knowing that man is definitely conditioned by his milieu, that at times man does not

free himself from that conditioning, and yet that man, not too rarely, transcends his necessary conditioning'¹.

Satyajit Ray's Portrayal of the Child in Films

Ray's portrayal of the child in films, considering all possible implications of the term, has an equally interesting feature. He significantly restrains himself from 'patronising' children in any way or considering them as having 'limited intelligence'. He did not believe in offering them 'kids' stuff' since that is not always what they desire to see and have. He did not disparage a child's level of intelligence and his curiosity, rather allowed him to explore the ways of the world in his own way. A child's intelligence, therefore, needs to be respected and Ray offered him situations that required critical and analytical thinking, along with making ethical judgements, even on his (the child's) part. Such a feature is distinguishably present in his 1974-film *Sonal Kella*, only one of the two Feluda novellas that Ray had made films on, the other being *Joy Baba Felunath* ('The Elephant God'), later discussed in this paper. The former, the English equivalent of which would be 'The Golden Fortress', is 'a visually wonderful film with an excellent narrative and a vibrant array of characters, offering good food for thought and, especially to the keener thinkers in its audience, some serious intellectual challenges'².

Sonal Kella ('The Golden Fortress')

The film opens in the somewhat heavy atmosphere of the dead of the night, with a young boy of about eight, MukulDhar, sitting at a desk drawing pictures. It transpires that this is his habit, worrying as it is to his parents, for what he is drawing is taken from his memory of the golden fortress in which he lived – apparently – in a previous life. There is an interview with a news reporter, in which the boy's genuineness would seem to be established, and then he is taken by an expert in parapsychology, one Dr. Hazra, to Rajasthan to see if his golden fortress can be found and so shed some light on the unusual problem that keeps him from his bed at night and has taken away his ability to laugh. Uncertain of the boy's safety, despite the care of Dr. Hazra, his father seeks the help of Feluda. The father's natural misgiving is not unwarranted for, due to the reporter's piece in the newspaper. Eventually, two crooks see the opportunity of getting rich by means of Mukul, and set about following him and Dr. Hazra to Rajasthan. Feluda senses good reason to share Mr. Dhar's worry, and decides that he and Topse will go to Rajasthan by the next morning's train². One interesting feature of the narrative is, of course, the introduction of a very unique character, Lalmohan Ganguly, otherwise known as Jatayu, who was a popular writer of detective fiction. A man of 'mirthful intensity' and 'boyish enthusiasm', despite his years, develops a long-standing friendship with Feluda and Topse, Feluda's cousin and assistant, and the three subsequently visit Jaisalmer in Rajasthan – the place where the climactic scenes of the film are set. The narrative follows with the help of some apparently basic clues, but the intrigue lies in watching

how Feluda builds on those meagre options. Matters get complex by the ongoing conniving malice of the two crooks, one of whom assumes the identity of Dr. Hazra. For much of the time, the pair are able to keep at least one step ahead of Feluda, until at last they are caught by the detective's keen eye for detail. But, what remains as the all-pervading theme is Mukul's memory of a previous life – a fact on which hinges the entire narrative. What evolves as an irony here is the difference that is there between the boy's reminiscences and the actuality of modern-day Rajasthan. The Rajasthani experience is, cinematically, extremely important in that it provides the film with a cultural context that is vital to the narrative as well as sensually delightful. Very importantly, it has a significance from an educational point of view in the sense that it has the objective to develop the understanding of a young audience related to the vastness and diversity of a multicultural country. This cultural context is made poignant with a street music performance followed by another at a railway station that are worthily integrated with the narrative – the first indicating Mukul's sympathy with the song, perhaps emanating from a previous awareness of it, and the second giving Feluda an opportunity to go one up on the two crooks. A delightful film indeed, *Sonar Kella* provides ample scope for reflection on the part of a younger audience since the narrative here works somewhat differently insofar as Feluda's powers of investigation are extended to ensuring the safety of Mukul rather than to solving a crime that 'has' happened. The story revolves on pre-empting a crime that 'might' happen and the child's role in the vibrant action of the film. The role is wholly psychological and he becomes not only the lynchpin of all situations that evolve but a vital actor in the intrigue itself. The subsequent happenings teach him to introspect and arrive at an ethical judgement of the right and the wrong. The filmmaker's challenge perhaps lies in being able to achieve the objective that the film sets out in its initiation, and the challenge facing Ray was always about ushering a humane consciousness through ethical action.

***Joy Baba Felunath* (The Elephant God)**

Four years after *Sonar Kella*, Ray made *Joy Baba Felunath* ('The Elephant God'). Despite fraudulence, lies, theft, violent intimidation and murder, the film maintains a great sense of fun. The crooks in this film are perceivably more clever and sophisticated than the two insensitive and malevolent charlatans in *Sonar Kella*, but Ray still gives his audience to deride them.

Having come to Benaras on a holiday, along with Topse and Lalmohan, Feluda is soon engaged by one Umanath Ghosal after the theft of a valuable statuette of the elephant god, Ganesh. Initially, Maganlal Meghraj, an apparently shady collector, offers to buy the statuette from his erstwhile university contemporary Umanath, but is met with a refusal – after all, the item is not his but belongs to his father, Ambika. Later, we see a crime being committed: a shadowy figure takes a key from a drawer in the room where Ambika is asleep and, in the process of opening the safe where the statuette is kept, is

disturbed by Ambika who wakes up in alarm. A series of events followed thereafter including a scene where the elderly knife-thrower employed by Maganlal, later revealed to be an art smuggler, puts up a 'show' with the petrified Lalmohan as the target around whom his knives are thrown. There are several suspects. Maganlal himself might be the prime one, but he insists that the Ganesh was not stolen but sold to him by Umanath. Umanath himself is under a shadow of doubt, given his formal though not unfriendly association with Maganlal and, more importantly, the troubles in business he is presently experiencing. The long-time servant, Bikash, who might well have been the figure eavesdropping on the meeting between Maganlal and Umanath, also might well have been the shadowy figure up to no good in Ambika's bedroom. The earliest clues to the whereabouts of the stolen artefact are provided in what might seem to be a segment of mere decoration but no real relevance. The opening scene of the film sees Umanath's small son, Ruku – about five or six years old – with the elderly artisan, Shashi, who has almost completed the images for the imminent festival of the goddess Durga; the old man is found telling the child about the myth of the Mother Goddess slaying a demon. Some interesting elements are introduced here. One is an old man and a little boy, hardly likely to figure centrally in a crime story, and yet they will. Another is Durga's mount – the lion – that, like Ruku and Shashi, will assume a special and most unlikely importance. And, on a somewhat higher plane, Ray uses the grand cosmic theme of the conflict between good and evil to introduce us to a conflict between Feluda and his companions on the one hand, and some nasty crooks on the other².

The narrative is exceptionally well structured. There is no call for fantasy or appeal to the supernatural, with the substance being reasonably mundane. The story follows a direct and strictly logical progression, starting from a simple case of burglary. Things become gradually complicated as challenging mind-teasers are thrown to keep the audience thinking. The theft turns out to be actually an 'intention' to steal, but before that is realized, there has to be a murder to provide further clues. Feluda's snaring of Maganlal is not only intelligent but also hilarious. Ultimately what evolves from all the possible devices of the plot is the significance of positive values and their inculcation in young minds. The film, needless to say, attaches the fullest value to the young. Topse, in the film, is still more of a boy than a young man, and Ruku is still a child. What is remarkable, in this case, is the fact that Feluda and Lalmohan relate to young people, in this film Ruku, wonderfully well, always communicating on the same level and never patronizing. The film, hence, offers yet another example of the fact that Ray, as a conscientious filmmaker, never dished out to the young materials that are conventionally made use of to be, in their turn, blindly and uncritically taken for the sake of 'childish' pleasure. Ruku's involvement in the plot is markedly intellectual and he even offers a couple of riddles for Feluda to solve which, of course, the latter does with understandable ease, but the point that emerges here as significant is the continuous engagement of

the child in seeking to work out the nuances of the mystery that is so central to the plot. He actively participates and, in the process of such participation, the child is able to transcend his conventional social conditioning. The child learns to evaluate some experiences and feelings as 'good' and some others as 'bad', and this learning becomes more meaningful since he is able to relate the circumstances to his life. The child's natural desire to learn is sharpened particularly because he evolves as a significant actor in the entire scheme of things. An atmosphere of warmth and trust is created wherein the learning process of the child becomes constructive and, very importantly, humanistic.

'Phatikchand'

'Phatikchand' (though not directed by Ray himself but by Sandip, his son, in 1983, it is also taken up for discussion in this paper alongside the other Ray-directed films since the story, screenplay and music of the film comprise the former's creation) is another film that befittingly encourages the young audience again to realize the fact that the essence of education is much larger than what is conventionally conceived and offered to children. Education that fails to inculcate human values is not worthy enough, both socially and culturally, and this needs to be primarily perceived and initiated from childhood. The film presents the narrative of an eleven-year oldboy named Bablu who, while returning from school one day, gets kidnapped by a group of crooks who had the intention of extracting a fair ransom from his father, a reputed and affluent barrister. But while escaping in a car having the boy with them, the vehicle metwith an accident due to a head-on collision with a truck. Two of the four kidnappers die and two others flee from the place. Bablu is left alone, injured and unconscious. Next morning, another truck comes the same way and the driver finds him in a state of utter desperation trying hard to decipher what actually has happened, and takes the boy along with him. He takes care of Bablu by offering him a glass of warm milk after which the latter regains his composure, but shockingly loses his memory and is by that time seldom able to recollect his past. At the roadside stall where the truck-driver stops for a glass of milk for Bablu, a man who is himself bound for Kharagpur apparently comes to the boy's rescue. He takes Bablu in his car and, having reached the place, goes to see a doctor for a proper treatment. When Bablu realizes that he is to be taken to the police, he escapes from the doctor's chamber and thereafter chances to meet a man named Haroun-al-Rashid, a juggler by profession, in a train. From this point onwards, life completely changes for Bablu who now emerges to become Phatikchand, Haroun's associate, given the fact that he even forgets his name and hence comes to call himself Phatikchand – a name he found written on a calendar in the doctor's chamber at Kharagpur and eventually remembered when asked by Haroun in the train as to what his name was. Through a lot of interesting array of incidents, Phatik learns the lesson of life. He comes face-to-face with reality as he accompanies Haroun in all his street shows. He realizes that the art of performing the tricks that the virtuoso

displays requires an enormous amount of skill, craftsmanship, practice, dedication and, most importantly, honesty. These artists, in spite of possessing great artistry, are seldom given their due – a fact that cast them into eternal penury and suffering. At the same time, Phatik realizes that Haroun is not only an extraordinary performer, but a great human being. He grows so passionate about Haroun and his art that he does not even wish to return home, and this becomes a matter of concern for the latter. Subsequently, Phatik's father publishes an advertisement in the newspaper declaring a fair amount as prize money for anybody who brings back his son. Haroun coincidentally brings Phatik back, after the latter got back his memory in due course of time, without being aware of the news of the reward. Father and son meet after a long time whereby Phatik again becomes Bablu and is received with delight by his family. But the remembrance of Haroun, his once-upon-a-time artist-master, remains with him and he feels disturbed about his father's rudeness towards Haroun in spite of the fact that the latter saved him and brought him back to his family. Bablu thereafter comes to know about the piece of news published by his father and about the possibility that Haroun might have become a rich man having received the money from his father. On the other hand, the reality is that Bablu's father, in spite of such a declaration about the monetary reward, does not pay Haroun a single penny – a fact that later haunts him and he feels regretful about. As a result, he sends Bablu with the promised sum of money in the form of a cheque to hand it over, in his turn, to Haroun. When Bablu reaches the latter's house, a neighbour informs about Haroun's departure for Madras where he is to go for a show, a journey he has been wishing to undertake for quite some time but has not been able to because of his responsibility towards Phatik. Bablu immediately leaves for the station and, after much of an anxious search, comes across his friend, philosopher and guide of the happy bygone days as Phatik. When he offers Haroun the cheque, he finds – to his utter surprise – Haroun answering in a startlingly humane way saying that he shall not accept the money since he has always considered Phatik as his younger brother, and that no question of money can arise in the midst of two brothers who are tied only by the bond of love and nothing else, nothing material. This moment perhaps becomes the supreme learning experience for Bablu and he remains so baffled that he continues to stare at Haroun with tears in his eyes. He realizes that it is possible for a man to remain completely sincere, loyal and, more significantly, human even in a situation of utmost poverty and deprivation. This is the kind of realization perhaps intended by the filmmaker not only for a particular child character in his film but for his young audience as well. He again presents a life situation and very suavely demonstrates it with the help of an artistically constructed series of incidents so that the story comes to have a transformational impact in the minds of the young. The film does offer a scope for an engaged reflection on life and an understanding of the very element of humaneness as the supreme virtue of man. It is this virtue that makes life beautiful and ties all human beings with the bond of love, compassion and trust.

‘Two’: ‘Two’ is a short film made in the year 1964 as a part of a trilogy of short films from India that was commissioned by the U.S. Public Television and was made under the banner of Esso World Theater. The film is uniquely made without any dialogues transpiring between two children, one of them belonging to a rich household and the other to a poor village hut. The film begins with the rustic child playing a flute, in the open fields outside, the tune of which reaches his affluent counterpart. As soon as the music is heard by the latter who remains confined to his house and follows the rustic boy only from his windows, he brings his expensive toys to bear upon the poor child. The toys are made to make strange sounds in order for the cacophony to ruthlessly suppress the serene and pure music of the flute. Thereafter, the kite flown by the village boy was also contested and more toys were brought in to counter it. At the end of this confrontation, the sound of the flute persists perhaps symbolizing the triumph of the truth of the natural over the contrived, of the eternal over the transient, of the pure over the profaned. The film is evidently made with children characters but calls for a perspicacious understanding on their part of the social reality by foregrounding the age-old antagonism between the haves and the have-nots, the master and the slave, the centre and the periphery. The work may hence be interpreted, not without convincing implications, as an attempt to subvert the conventional hierarchical societal order by re-asserting the simple and ingenuous tune of the flute that does sufficiently serve to prove the rich man’s means a complete foil in spite of the latter’s supposed grandeur and opulence. The complete absence of speech affirms the underlying meaning and evolves as an excellent cinematic ploy to impinge on the minds of the young audience a thought and a realization of the possible differences they may share amongst themselves in their respective real-life situations. The film does certainly appeal to the sense of humaneness and seeks to educate the child’s mind by bringing before him a representation of his own condition. It therefore calls for an ethical judgement on the child’s part instead of offering him one. Life is about choices and cinema here represents only the choices without providing any conclusions. It leaves space for the child’s thought and in seeking to choose one and not the other or the vice versa he comes close to achieving what perhaps the filmmaker wants him to achieve – emerging not only as an autonomous learner but, most significantly, a better human being in the future.

‘Pikoo’: ‘Pikoo’ is also a short film made in 1980 and is based on a short story named ‘Pikoor Diary’ (‘Pikoo’s Diary’) written by Ray for one of his books, *Pikoor Diary o Onyanyo*. The film depicts the happenings in the life of a six-year old child, Pikoo, with his mother’s alleged illicit relationship as the backdrop. The events take place in a single day when Pikoo stays at home for a holiday in school. The film opens with Pikoo’s father, Ranjan, suspecting Seema, his wife and Pikoo’s mother, having an infelicitous relation with someone. Pikoo remains unaware of his father’s remarks and enjoys his holiday playing to his heart’s content. In the process, he gets disturbed by the noise of barking of a dog coming from a neighbour’s house and he shouts at it

after which it coincidentally stops – a success Pikoo feels delightful about. The film also beautifully showcases the affectionate relationship Pikoo shares with his 80-year-old sick grandfather, Loknath. He tells him about the conversations and quarrels of his parents and urges him not to share these little secrets with anyone. After some time, Hitesh, with whom Seema illegally relates, comes over and hands over to Pikoo a gift, consisting of a drawing book and a set of sketch pens. Pikoo, a small boy that he is, finds it exciting and draws pictures and shows them to his mother and Hitesh. Seema then suggests her son to go to the garden and draw the flowers with the help of the sketch pens. Pikoo finds the proposal very interesting and runs to the garden with the book and the coloured pens. He draws some flowers with due care but is struck with surprise when he comes across a white lily in the pond. Pikoo feels puzzled at not having a white-coloured sketch pen and shouts from the garden to inform his mother that the set of pens he has with him does not have a white one in it and that it is hence not possible for him to draw it. On receiving no response from her mother, he uses a black-coloured pen from the set and draws the flower. But then a drop of rain spoils his drawing and he runs inside the house. He overhears the fight that takes place between Seema and Hitesh and, since he now knows how to stop loud clamorous noises, he uses the same technique and this time also it works. He runs to his grandfather to show him his drawings but realizes, to his utter shock, that the latter has passed away. Not knowing what to do, Pikoo runs back to the drawing room and sits in the balcony crying. The film ends with Seema opening the door and, very significantly, avoiding eye contact with her son. The film is perceptibly replete with a lot of symbolism that is subtle, poignant and very deeply grounded in the events of the narrative, which are portrayed from the point of view of a child to whom the world is an innocent place filled with natural beauties and wonders. Being in such an innocuous world, the child feels perplexed not to have found the colour white as a result of which he feels compelled to choose black in order to portray something white. The question has stark and shocking parallels to a world inhabited by adults. The single-day holiday brings home for Pikoo this reality which he probably would never have confronted had he remained outside it in his own world of guileless thoughts. He loses the person he loved the most – his grandfather – and the death becomes an irony of what the old man said to Pikoo, before, regarding the fact that he would call the latter when he would have a coronary thrombosis again. The beautiful world of Pikoo is maligned by a drop of rain which comes as an ominous sign and as a portent of a disastrous consequence – a death which nobody else but Pikoo discovers first. This event of demise of his loving grandfather stains the child’s holiday forever, and this is how the profaned takes over the innocent and beautiful in a shockingly rude way. But in spite of that, the shame of malignity does not let Seema to even look at her son at the end. Hence, the strength of innocence is nowhere belittled – an idea that is very pronouncingly evident in Ray’s cinematic philosophy. The filmmaker awakens the child as well as his child audience to a stark realization of the virtues of human character and the value

of human relationships through his richly metaphorical narrative. He also nonetheless shows the conflicts going on in the mind of Pikoo's mother. She is and, at the same time, is not sensitive, being often overpowered with moral dilemmas. We are almost shocked by the virtual deprivation that the child undergoes, being completely helpless at the end with a dead grandfather on one side and an unfaithful and pretentious mother on the other. The film leaves us wondering about the calamitous denouement resulting from a child's experience of confrontation between an illusion and the reality. The work, like much of Ray's oeuvre, does strongly evoke questions on ethical judgement and action and does foreground its need in the midst of modern-day degradation that is fast eating into the vitals of the human society. Education for children begins at home, and this should constitute a serious consideration for all adults responsible for their care, nurturance and growth.

Conclusion

Hence, as it can be well perceived that the films discussed here reveal the essence of education and a healthy development of the mind, rejecting the convention of conceiving children as being mere 'sponges' who could easily be moulded and silenced with superficial elements of commercial entertainment designed for them. The uniqueness of Ray's films, both for the young and for the child actors involved in them, was that they dealt with the theme of childhood without taking advantage of the child's 'supposed' immaturity but rather with a recognition of his (the child's) needs and potentialities and respect for his innocence. The films are exceptionally well structured with a view to

offering different portraits revealing different realities of the country to the young in order to enable their cultural acquaintance with their country as well. John Hood states in his detailed study *Beyond the World of Apu: The Films of Satyajit Ray*:

[Ray's films for the young] can hardly be called 'children's films' in the way in which the term might generally be employed, for they are in no way childish in any particular appeal nor do they exclude adults In dealing with child actors, it is said, Ray was never patronising; he directed them as he would direct adult actors, recognising, of course, their individual needs and potentialities. He took a similar approach to a young audience Ray never saw young people as gullible; to him, their innocence was something to be treated with respect, something that had to be nurtured, not exploited².

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