

Book Reviews

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MARIE SETON. *Portrait of a Director Satyajit Ray*.
New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2003, pp:i-xxiv + 368,
Price: INR 495.00, ISBN: 978-0-143-02972-4, ASIN: 014302972X

Marie Seton's *Portrait of a Director Satyajit Ray* celebrates the life and works of one of India's greatest filmmakers who single-handedly managed to put Indian cinema on the global map. First published in 1971, this book was subsequently revised in 2003 in order to include some of the later films of Ray. Divided into fourteen chapters, this book chronicles the journey of this incredible person who is an institution in himself. In fact, this book is mainly intended for the innumerable film aficionados who would love to get a sneak-peak into the life and work of the master craftsman. In this revised edition, Seton traces the genealogical tree of Ray's family where a young Ray was said to have grown up in an environment where people immersed themselves in the ordinary affairs of everyday living. He espouses in his words, "I was cut off from everything intellectual. Even in college I was not aware. Santiniketan made the difference. I suppose I observed things without being conscious of doing so. Even now in creating I am intuitive rather than analytical". Nevertheless, such an environment did not deter the young Ray in blossoming into one of the finest filmmakers that the country has ever produced. It was perhaps, this very upbringing that instilled in him the values of both the head and heart. Seton has delineated very beautifully about the most important contribution made by this prolific filmmaker – The Apu Trilogy. On his adaptation of Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee's story into a classic movie, Ray later mentions in an article, "I chose Pather Panchali for the qualities that made it a great book; its humanism, its lyricism and its ring of truth".

This book also contains two previously unpublished pieces by Marie Seton which basically deals with the selection of locations and music in the making of a film by Satyajit Ray. Ray was very particular in selecting the locations in order to

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film the scenes. As Seton has himself remarked, “One of the most striking things about the collaboration between Ray and the Art Directors – most frequently Bansi Chandragupta – is the difficulty, is not impossibility, of the viewer being able to detect where the use of locations fuses into a set built in a studio”. The only shortcoming of this book is that Seton misses out on analysing those nine films which were made between 1978 and 1991 (prior to Ray’s demise). However, Indrani Majumdar, who had spent over two decades researching on Ray’s films had meticulously critiqued those nine iconic films in her ‘Afterword’ that was inserted towards the end of the book. She can also be credited for compiling the Chronology, Filmography and List of Awards for the benefit of the readers.

Ray not only depicted the lives of financially impoverished people in his films, but also the opulent Bengali zamindari society of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The author had said that some of the films like *Jalsagar*, *Devi* and *Monihara* explore the obsessions which dominate and bring disaster to people living within the enclosed world of zamindari society. Overall, this book, which is a result of extensive research and close association with the Ray family chronicles the life of the master craftsman himself, Satyajit Ray and the many hats worn by him- that of a musician, a scenarist and a director. The author’s style of writing is lucid and is suitable for the intended audience. Even the language used is clear and convincing. This new and revised edition is expected to re-introduce the genius of Ray to an entire new generation of readers and film aficionados.

Pallavi Gogoi*

MAYA ANGELOU. *Letter to My Daughter*.
New York, U.S.A: Random House, 2009,
pp: i-xii+192, Price US \$15.00, ISBN: 978-0-8129-8003-5

In yet another interesting anthology of reflective essays, Maya Angelou weaves her magic into narrating some of the finer details of her eventful journey of life. Some of these narratives barely find a description in the series of her autobiographical volumes. With its autobiographical undertone, *Letter to My*

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Satyajit Ray (1921–1992), a Bengali film director from India, is well known for his contributions to Bengali literature. He created two of the most famous characters in Feluda the sleuth, and Professor Shanku the scientist. He wrote several short novels and stories in addition to those based on these two characters. His fiction was targeted mainly at younger readers, though it became popular among children and adults alike. Seton, Marie, Portrait of a Director: Satyajit Ray, London, St Ann's Press 1971. Montage No 5/6 July 1966, Anandam Film Society Publication, Bombay. World Film Directors, Volume 11 1945-1958, Wilson Company, 1988. Web Resources. Compiled by Michelle Carey. Satyajit Ray Film and Study Collection Excellent website for the non-profit educational organisation dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of Ray's cinematic, literary and artistic oeuvre. Satyajit Ray Good overview of the filmmaker as part of Film India's website. Maanvi Media presents. Satyajit Ray Great resource for information on his films, awards, books, crews, biography, testimonials. Satyajit Ray Good (though basic) site with some enlightening articles.