

Satyajit Ray: The Man of Delineation

Sayan Sarkar

sarkarsayan68@gmail.com

Library Assistant, Brainware University, West Bengal, India

Abstract

Whenever the career of Satyajit Ray is discussed, it is always about his films. But he also left his mark as an illustrator and artist, a facet still unknown to many. His book cover designs to book illustrations; his portraits to his invention of new typography; these are all world -class creations. Most of the original artwork has been lost. A few copies of the original are found here and there. This paper tries to analytically break down his artwork and origin and tries to offer a glimpse of Satyajit Ray's majestic works of art to the world.

Keywords- Satyajit Ray, Illustrator, Calligraphy, Painter, Graphic Designer

Introduction

Satyajit Ray (2 May, 1921 – 23 April, 1992) was an Indian filmmaker, writer, music composer, editor and illustrator. He is considered as one of the greatest 20th century film directors of world cinema. Whenever someone mentions the great RAY, it is always synonymous to his film career. Sometimes his literary prowess comes up but almost never his credibility as an illustrator, artist or graphic designer sees the light of day. This paper will try to shed light on this virtually lesser known aspect of Ray's work.

Research Methodology

The author performed in-depth review of five books which are known as the most authentic sources of information on Ray's career, life and his impact on others. These famous and well-known books are written by eminent personalities. The following books have been reviewed to take a look into Ray's artistic career. According to Mrs. Bijoya Ray, wife of Mr. Satyajit Ray, *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye: the Biography of a Master Film-maker by Andrew Robinson* and *Portrait of a director by Seton, Marie* can be considered as the most authentic telling of Ray's life. (*Manik and I: My Life with Satyajit Ray* by Bijoya Ray, Penguin Random House, India, 2012)

1. *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye : the Biography of a Master Filmmaker* by W. Andrew Robinson, Rupa Publication, 1990
 2. *Portrait of a director* by Seton, Marie: Penguin Random House, India, 2003
 3. *Satyajit Ray: An Intimate Master*, by Santi Das (Editor), Papyrus Publishing House; 2004
 4. *Satyajit Ray: Essays (1970-2005)* by Roberge, Gaston, Manohar Publishers, 2004
 5. *মানিকদার সঙ্গে (Manik Dar Songe)*, by Chattopadhyay Soumitra, Aajkaal Publishers Pvt Ltd, 2006
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Findings

“The quiet but deep observation, understanding love of the human race which are characteristic of all his films, have impressed me greatly. Mr. Ray is wonderful and respectful man. I feel that he is a ‘giant’ of the movie industry”- Akira Kurosawa, Japanese film director, screenwriter and producer.

1. Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye: the Biography of a Master Filmmaker

The aforementioned quotation serves as the monologue of *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye: the Biography of a Master Filmmaker*. Ironically, this quotation sums up the whole subject matter of the book (by **W. Andrew Robinson**). This book, popularly known as *The Inner Eye*, discusses in great extent Ray’s filmography, his film characteristics and his impact on his peers. But there is no mention of his graphic designer past or his incredible talent of illustrations other than his script visualization process.

2. Portrait of a director

Marie Seton’s detailed study of Ray, the product of thorough research and a long and close association of Ray himself and his family, is considered the most detailed biography of the great Ray. Although in her book she reviewed Ray as a musician, screenwriter and director, Seton discussed at great length Ray’s script and music composition which also makes the book very unique. But the acclaimed author, for some unknown reason, also skipped the part of Ray’s legendary achievement as a calligrapher.

3. Satyajit Ray: An Intimate Master

This book is an invaluable source work for studies in the work of Ray and offers fascinating reading at the same time. This book is a collection of articles by experts and some of Ray’s closest associates and friends. These articles talk about his entire range of creativity as a director, writer and designer. In the section on DESIGN, there are 400-odd illustrations and only one article by Subramanyan, K.G. – “*The graphic Talent of Satyajit Ray*”. But here he discussed Ray’s academic career at Visva-Bharati and how he was influenced by two great Indian painters, Nandalal Bose and Benode Behari Mukherjee. And how his time at the university influenced his designs. But there are no analytical reviews or discussion of any kind.

4. Satyajit Ray: Essays (1970-2005)

This book offers several essays written by Gaston Roberge, from 1970 to 2005. These essays contain several topics: Ray’s friendship with the author, Ray’s films, Ray’s cinematic views and very rare observation of Ray on Film as an Academic Subject. Though this book offers a rare view on Ray as a friend, it has no collection of Ray’s artwork of any kind,

5. মানিকদার সঙ্গে

This book is penned by legendary film artiste and thespian Soumitra Chatterjee who often collaborated with Ray on many projects. This book serves as a very personal memoir on Ray by late Chatterjee, who recollects his experience with Ray as a work colleague and friend and how he had an influential role to Chatterjee's growth as an actor and human being. But again this recollection of personal experiences of Chatterjee has failed to highlight the artistic side of Ray as a graphic designer.

From the aforementioned books, it is visible that though his work as a director, writer or even composer is widely discussed, his life as a designer is still virtually nonexistent.

There are very few works on Ray's artistic triumphs. These artistic fronts of Ray have been depicted in these books. But surprisingly the official website of RAY (<https://satyajitrayworld.org/>) does not include the following books except the first one.

1. **Satyajit Ray's art**, Rangoonwalla, Firoze. Clarion, 1980.
2. **The Art of Satyajit Ray**, Oxford Book Shop, 1995
3. **Looking Beyond: Graphics of Satyajit Ray**, Sen, Jayanti, Roli Books Pvt Ltd, 2012
4. **রং তুলির সত্যজিৎ** (Rang Tulir Satyajit), Deb, Debasish, Ananda Publisher, 2015

“রং তুলির সত্যজিৎ”

In “রং তুলির সত্যজিৎ”, Debasish Deb wrote:

From Ray's childhood he was capable of painting. By his own admission, “*Since 13/14 years of age I can draw a portrait...it's a family boon.*” He further stated, “*In the subject of drawing I had a natural flow.*”

In 1940, M.C, Sarkar and Sons published “**PAGLA DASHU** (পাগলা দাশু)” written by Sukumar Ray. His son Satyajit Ray illustrated the cover page and for the first time gave the readers of this timeless tale's titular character a FACE. In fact, it was the first book cover design ever created by Ray.

In 1940, he enrolled himself at his mother's insistence at Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan, founded by Rabindranath Tagore, to pursue Indian Art. Here he came under the tutelage of two great Indian painters, Nandalal Bose and Benode Behari Mukherjee.

In the month of April, 1943 Ray joined at D.J. Keymer, a British advertising agency, as a junior visualiser. Here he was commissioned to illustrate the cover for the abridged version of the famous novel, **Pather Panchali** (পথের পাঁচালী) by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay. Working on the illustration inspired him to make a motion picture on the novel.

Discussion

By going through Ray's artistic career one can classify his artistic works in five phases:

1. Advertisement Design

2. Book Cover Design
3. Illustration
4. Portrait
5. Calligraphy/Typography

Advertisement Design

Ray started his career with at D.J. Keymer, and moved on to work for Signet Press, a brand new publishing House, started by D.K. Gupta. At his tenure with these two companies, he forged the path to reject the effect of colonization-inspired BANGALIYANA (বাঙালিয়ানা), and Indianism. He delicately brought in more classical Indian motifs and elements.

“Indian Advertisement should be Indian”-SATYAJIT RAY



Fig.5 Print Advertisement made by RAY in 1949 for ICI, a paint manufacturing company
(Image Source -Society for the Preservation of Satyajit Ray Archives)

Book Cover Design

Ray's first book cover design was for “PAGLA DASHU” written by Sukumar Ray. From the very beginning, he forged his own path to design book covers. He never drew the subject of a book, but the inner meaning and characteristics of that book. So the readers could always capture the inner feeling of the book or what to expect when they turned the cover of the book.

One of the prime examples of his creativity lies on the “**Man-Eaters of Kumaon**” (কুমায়ূনের মানুষখেকো বাঘ) by Jim Corbett, 1944. Here on the front cover lies a tiger skin, with a spot like it’s been shot. At the white spot the Title and Author Inscription. In the back cover the white spot is bigger like an exit wound.



Fig.5 1950 Bengali edition of *Man Eaters of Kumaon* - design by Satyajit Ray

(Image Source - Society for the Preservation of Satyajit Ray Archives)

Illustration

Though it’s a complex subject, yet here his aesthetic abilities are most prominent. Every art is different from others. Whether the book belonged to the same genre, or was written by the same author, it is still different. Ray’s illustration of **RAJKAHINI** (রাজকাহিনী) and **APAN KATHA** (আপন কথা), both written by Abanindranath Tagore, are totally different in style. But the best example is how he drew his own creation, the famous Bengali sleuth **FELUDA** (ফেলুদা)



Fig.6A **BADSAHI ANNGTI** and **DARJEELING JOMJOMAT**, **FELUDA** by Ray, Satyajit (Image Source – **FELUDA SAMAGRA** (ফেলুদা সমগ্র), Ananda Publishers)

His illustrations were a big part throughout his filmmaking process. The way he visualized a scene, it always found a way into his famous **Kheror Khata** (খেরোর খাতা). It was also a big part of his costume designing rituals.



Fig.6B Costume Design



Fig.6C Script Visualization

(Image Source - Society for the Preservation of Satyajit Ray Archives)

Portrait

Ray's work as a portrait artist took him to another level. Throughout his life he sketched more over 150 portraits. One of them is of **Jamini Roy**, the famous Indian painter. He sketched Jamini Roy, by repeating the famous painter's own drawing strategy, on single stroke lines.

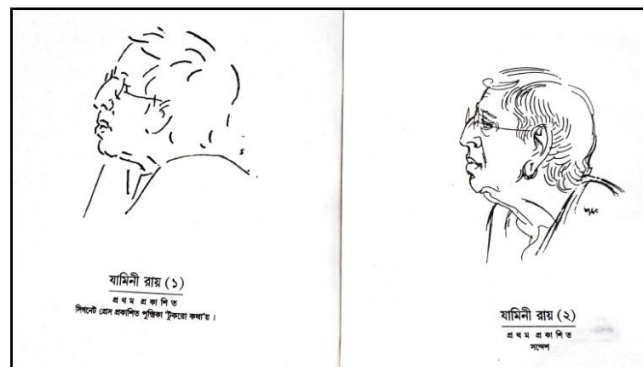


Fig.7A Jamini Roy, by Ray, Satyajit (Image Source – প্রতিকৃতি; Ananda Publishers)

His **Charlie Chaplin** sketch was a tribute to the “Vagabond of Cinematic Universe”. Just like the famous character played by **Charlie Chaplin**, the sketch was done in deep lines to resemble the journey of the “Vagabond”. His sketch was used in the book titled **Charlie Chaplin**, authored by Mrinal Sen in 1953.



Fig.7B Charlie Chaplin, by Ray, Satyajit (Image Source –প্রতিকৃতি; Ananda Publishers)

And last but definitely not the least, a portrait of **Pablo Picasso**, the world famous painter, is a masterpiece itself. In this sketch Ray used geometric lines and elements to draw the famous painter's face.

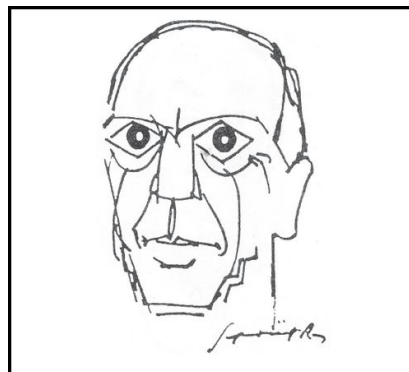


Fig.7C Pablo Picasso, by Ray, Satyajit (Image Source –প্রতিকৃতি; Ananda Publishers)

Calligraphy/Typography

Ray was always intrigued with Bengali and English typography. This led him to create four English typography designs for Roman script named **Ray Roman, Ray Bizarre, Daphnis and Holiday script**. His invention also got international recognition when he won an International Competition in 1971.



Fig.8A English Typography Designs by Satyajit Ray (Image Source - Society for the Preservation of Satyajit Ray Archives)

He also invented dozens of Bengali designs. His Bengali typography designs are commonly known as **The Satyajit Ray Styles**. These are still in use at **SANDESH** (সন্দেশ) magazine.



Fig.8B Bengali Typography Designs for SANDESH magazine by Satyajit Ray
(Image Source - Society for the Preservation of Satyajit Ray Archives)



Fig.8C Bengali Typography Designs AKA The Satyajit Ray Styles by Satyajit Ray

(Image Source - Society for the Preservation of Satyajit Ray Archives)

Conclusion

Ray, undoubtedly, is one of the prominent figures of Indian art to the rest of the world. Mainly he is viewed as a revolutionary narrator, whether it's his written stories or directed films. Ray's repertoire of legendary films often clouds his lesser known past as an illustrator, artist or graphic designer, which itself proved to be as interesting, well-structured and diverse as his filmography. In this area he had all the qualities but none of the well-deserved recognition.

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