

### Rendezvous with Ray

It was a **unique** friendship that developed between a French-Canadian priest and one of the world's greatest film directors, and had a **singular impact** on Bengali films both academically and practically. It was **en-route** to India in 1961, at a **stopover** in New York, that 26-year-old **Fr. Gaston Roberge** was acquainted with the works of Satyajit Ray through **the Apu Trilogy**. He found the world of Apu so fascinating that he saw all three films in one sitting; and there began his longstanding love affair with the people of India and Bengali cinema and culture, which led to **path-breaking** work in those fields. In his latest book, *Satyajit Ray, Essays 1970-2005*, a **compilation** of his essays as the name suggests, being published by Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, Roberge provides a **scholarly**, original analysis of Ray's works, giving an **insight** into the greatness of Ray both as a person and as an artist.

**Rendezvous** = an arrangement to meet somebody at a particular time and place

**Unique** = very special or unusual

**Singular** = very great or obvious (Syn.: Outstanding)

Here 'it' refers to the friendship between the two people (**Roberge and Ray**)

**Fascinating** = extremely interesting and attractive

**Trilogy** = A group of three books, films/movies, etc. that have the same subject or characters

**Path-breaking** = pioneering; innovative

**Compilation** = a collection of items, especially pieces of music or writing, taken from different places and put together

**Scholarly** = spending a lot of time studying and having a lot of knowledge about an academic subject

**Insight** = an understanding of what something is like

Roberge does not **endorse** the **accusation** of Ray's **detractors** that the master director made his **reputation** selling India's poverty to the West. "What struck me most was not the material poverty **depicted** in the films, but the enormous spiritual poverty of some rich people is much more **deplorable** than material poverty," he said. Roberge does not speak with the **arrogance** of the West. "I was here on a quest to know the world and in the process know myself. I did not come here to convert. In fact, I am the one who got converted," he said.

- Roberge does not support what the detractors of Ray said.

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**Endorse** = to say publicly that you support a person, statement or course of action

**Accusation** = blame

**Detractor** = a person who tries to make somebody/something seem less good or valuable by criticizing it

**Reputation** = name and fame

**Depicted** = described

**Material** = connected with money, possessions, etc. rather than with the needs of the mind or spirit

**Spiritual** = connected with the human spirit, rather than the body or physical things

**Deplorable** = very bad and unacceptable

**Arrogance** = rudeness

**The West** = The Western people

**Quest** = a long search for sth

But it took him nine years after reaching Calcutta (now Kolkatta) and joining St. Xavier's College, to **muster up** the confidence to meet Ray in person. "Although I wanted to meet him right away, I didn't want to just go and see him like he was a **living museum piece**. I wanted to prepare myself, get to know his works more, so that when we met, there could be a **worthwhile** dialogue," he said. When they finally met, it was the beginning of a close friendship that **lasted** 22 years- until Ray's death in 1992.

**Muster up** = to find as much support, courage, etc. as you can

**A living museum** is a type of museum which recreates historical settings to simulate past time periods, providing visitors with an experiential interpretation of history. It is a type of museum that recreates to the fullest extent conditions of a culture, natural environment or historical period.

**Worthwhile** = important, enjoyable, interesting, etc.

**Lasted** = continued/existed

It was a very **quiet** friendship that developed over the years. Manikda [as Ray was **affectionately** called by his friends] was a shy person and always very **discreet** about displaying his emotions,” said Roberge. Though to outsiders, Ray’s **massive** stature- physical and **intellectual**- might have made him come across as **cold, aloof** and even **intimidating**, he was in reality a very simple and **unassuming** man with a **subtle** sense of humour. It was an unspoken arrangement between the two of them to meet on Sundays at 9 a.m. at Ray’s residence on Bishop Lefroy Road, Kolkata. Ray would invite Roberge over for private **screenings** of his latest films and welcomed comments on them. But this happened only after the **friendship had cemented**, for in the early days of their dialogue Ray’s **shyness** prevented him from talking about his own films.

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**Quiet** = silent/calm  
**Affectionately** = lovingly  
**Discreet** = careful  
**Massive** = very large  
**Stature** = a person’s height; the importance a person has  
**Intellectual** = connected with or using a person’s ability to think in a logical way and understand things  
**Cold** = (of a person) without emotion; unfriendly  
**Aloof** = not friendly or interested in other people  
**Intimidating** = frightening  
**Unassuming** = not wanting to draw attention to yourself or to your abilities or status  
**Subtle** = not very noticeable or obvious  
**Screening** = the act of showing a film/movie or television programme  
**Friendship had cemented** = friendship had become stronger  
**Shyness** = the feeling of being nervous or embarrassed about meeting and speaking to other people

“He was even **shy of receiving compliments**,” said Roberge. To Roberge, the greatest mark of Ray’s appreciation for him was that he often addressed the French-speaking priest in Bengali, “in spite of my **lack of elegance** in that language, and the fact that Ray knew both English and Bengali so well.”

**Shy of receiving compliments** = **afraid of/not interested in** receiving compliments  
**Address (verb)** = to use a particular name or title for somebody when you speak or write to them  
**lack (of something)** the state of not having something or not having enough of something  
**Lack of elegance** = lack of attractiveness

Ray’s **screenplay manuscripts** were an art by themselves, Roberge says, “hand-written in Bengali, with notes in English for his set-designer, with sketches here and there, and occasional **staff notation** of **fragments** of music”. One Sunday morning, Roberge found Ray in a disturbed mood. A few well –known **personalities** of the city had visited him earlier to go through some of his manuscripts. After they left Ray found the *Charulatha* screenplay missing. Ray was almost sure who the **culprit** was. “I asked him whether he was planning to take any action, and he said no, and explained to me that he did not want to hurt the reputation of the person. I was absolutely **stunned** by his humane concern,” said Roberge.

**Screenplay** = the words that are written for a film /movie (= the script), together with instructions for how it is to be acted and filmed  
**Manuscript** = a very old book or document that was written by hand  
**Staff** = the five lines and four spaces between them on which musical notes are written  
**Fragments** = pieces  
**Personalities** = a famous person, especially one who works in entertainment or sport  
**Culprit** = person who has done sth wrong  
**Stunned** = very surprised or shocked  
**Humane** = kind  
**Concern** = feeling or attitude

Like Rabindranath Tagore, Ray **strode** his time like a **colossus**. Roberge writes, "It is as if all Bengal was in Manikda: the rich and the poor, the powerful and the humble, the peasants and the city persons, children, teenagers, adults and old people, men and women." Philosophically too, Roberge feels, Ray **took off** where Tagore **signed out**. If one compares the last major prose piece by Tagore, "**Shabhyatar Sankat**" (Crisis of Civilisation), which he wrote at the beginning of the Second World War, which contains his **immortal dictum** that in spite of what was happening it would be a **sin** to lose faith in Man, and the last three films of Ray- *Ganashatru*, *Shakha Prashakha*, and *Agantuk*-the **analogy** becomes clear.

**Stride** = to walk  
**Colossus** = a person or thing of great size, influence or ability  
**took off** = started  
**Signed out** = ended  
**Immortal** = that lives or lasts for ever  
**Dictum** = a statement that expresses something that people believe is always true or should be followed  
  
**sin** = an offence against God or against a religious or moral law  
**Analogy** = similarity or comparison

"In these three films Ray was at his most personal and when some **critics** saw the films as **didactic** and **verbose**, he felt deeply hurt. For, in these last films, Satyajit was directly talking to us, **conveying** his personal message on society and **civilization**. If the **impulse** that motivated his earlier films was **aesthetics** in the last three it was self-expression. And there we were **denying** him his right to speak. As the saying goes, no one is a **prophet** in his own country," said Roberge. An **agnostic** throughout his life, it is possible, Roberge feels, that in the face of death Ray was searching for an answer. This was suggested by some of the music that he used in *Shakha Prashakha*.

**Critic** = a person who expresses opinions about the good and bad qualities of books, music, etc.  
**Didactic** = designed to teach people something, especially a moral lesson  
**Verbose** = using or containing more words than are needed  
**Conveying** = making ideas or feelings known to somebody  
**Civilization** = a society, its culture and its way of life  
**Impulse** = a sudden strong wish or need to do something  
**Aesthetic** = the branch of philosophy that studies the principles of beauty, especially in art  
**Denying** = saying that something is not true  
**Prophet** = a person who teaches or supports a new idea, theory, etc.  
**Agnostic** = a person who believes that it is not possible to know whether God exists or not

The last time the two friends met, Ray was in hospital, on his deathbed. It was a Sunday and Roberge, **true to habit**, arrived **on the dot** at 9 a.m. "He had grown so weak that he looked **frail** as a child. I did not stay long, and as I was leaving, Manikda said, '*Bhalo laglo*' [it was nice]. Those were his last words to me," said Roberge.

**True to habit** = as was the habit  
**On the dot** = exactly on time  
**Frail** = weak and delicate

One important **fallout** of this friendship was the establishment of Chitrabani, a communication and film institute, the first of its kind in West Bengal, which Roberge **founded** in 1970 and to which Ray, as a **token** of friendship, lent his name as co-founder. Ray was in the first governing body and after a few terms readily agreed to be the institute's adviser. Roberge arranged most of the **initial** funding from Canadian agencies. "I had no reservations applying for them, for I feel richer countries in the West are **indebted** to countries like India," he said.

**Fallout** = result  
**found something** = to start something, such as an organization or an institution, especially by providing money  
**Token** = symbol  
**Governing body** = a group of people who formulate the policy and direct the affairs of an institution  
**initial** = at the beginning  
**Funding** = money for a particular purpose  
**indebted** (to somebody) (for something) (*formal*) grateful to somebody for helping you

For 26 years Roberge was the director of Chitrabani and under him the institute not only produced important **documentary** features, but also became **breeding ground** for local talent for film-making...

**Documentary** = a film or a radio or television programme giving facts about something  
**Feature** = a special article or programme about somebody/something  
**Breeding ground** = a place or situation that favours the development of something