

FROM ADVERTISING TO AUTEURSHIP: SATYAJIT RAY'S LEGACY ACROSS MEDIA

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Abstract

Satyajit Ray (1921-1992) is a legendary filmmaker, writer, illustrator, graphic designer. We all know him for his nuanced portrayal of the Indian society through his films and pen. Ray's films have travelled worldwide and won accolades and recognition from every corner of the globe. Yet, we fondly remember him as a film director, as an author but he was a complete creative soul! Satyajit Ray's contributions to advertising, typography and illustration remain largely unspoken of.

This paper explores Ray's innovative approach to Ad media through structured qualitative analysis of archives and secondary material that gives insight into Ray's imagination. His use of visuals established his position in the mediascape which the paper delves in, comparing it with contemporary media practices demonstrating his long-lasting impact in human minds and souls.

Keywords: *advertising, media, film, illustration.*

INTRODUCTION

Advertising and marketing are among the defining forces of twenty-first century consumer culture. According to Philip Kotler, advertising is the non-personal presentation of ideas, services and product by an identified sponsor which comes at the cost of money. Marketing is a management function but is closely related to ad distribution. Advertisements generate revenue. However, it was not very commercial from its inception. The introduction of printing technology, broadcast media and Industrial Revolution spurred commercial advertising.

Ray transformed advertising aesthetics by integrating modernist designs with indigenous visual traditions, opening new gateways. Through his brush and pen, he was able to demonstrate a distinctive advertising tone. Ray, having been born into a family of writers and poets was reared up in a "cultivating" atmosphere which is essential for Art to flourish. He can be termed to follow "Art for Life's sake". There have been records where he faced hardships while coming out with his first feature film, core financial issues. So, we can never say that all his "adventures" earned him commercial fame.

How the Journey Began : Year 1943, in the backdrop of Second World War, Satyajit Ray joined as Junior visualizer in the British ad-agency – D. J. **Keymer**, now popularly known as *Ogilvy*. Under the guidemanship of artist Annada Munshi, he bridged the gaps between modern

European culture and Indian art forms and picked up technical intricacies of layout and production design. When Ray joined Keymer, the agency was going through a purple patch, handling accounts of major brands like **Philips, Liptons, Dunlop, CK Sen, Tea Board, Burmah Shell, ICI, ITC, Atlantis East, Bata, Martin Burn Group** and others. He soon became the art director of the agency in 1950. At this point he started binge-watching movies, “99 movies in four and a half month” and was highly influenced by Vittorio De Sica’s ‘*Bicycle Thieves*’ which inspired him to start filmmaking.

Ad Campaigns undertaken by him-

- *Paludrine*, an anti-malarial drug made by **Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI)**. It is located at Chowringhee. In the 90s, it got its pharmaceutical spin-off, nowadays it goes with the name of **AstraZeneca**- the maker of Covid-19 vaccine. The campaign appeared in the form of a series in newspapers, these were made dramatic and narrative both characterising a movie. The daily lives of households caught on a random Sunday was targeted where family members were seen interacting with each other in a common living space taking **Paludrine**. One showed a modern Indian family with a retinue of helpers, the other depicted a traditional middle class family, the third a family in a garden setting.
- One can notice the influence of Ray’s days at **Santiniketan** in the brush drawings of *Jabakusum* hair oil ads. The ads ran on satire on how modern women hesitated combing hair or having a shower to prevent hair loss. Similar to Ray’s sketches in his short stories, one gets the underlying message of these ads without even reading the accompanied text.
- The ad campaign for the **Indian Tea Board** was more *infographic* in nature - telling us the five rules for making good tea.
- In many of the *Chelsea* cigarettes, Ray imitated Britain brushstroke styles. Four panels for this ad embodied a different story each.

Ray had designed five **billboards**, or **hoardings**. The most striking among them showed the characters of *Apu* and *Durga* running through a wide open landscape, against a backdrop of lowering monsoon clouds, with only the film’s title etched on the image. **Karukrit** was one such ad agency which pioneered in ad campaigns in which Satyajit Ray was an important contributor. His brilliant poster for ITMEB in 1947 presents a chaste, sari-clad ‘Mother India’, seated behind the iconic Gandhian *charkha*, enjoying a cup of tea, against a field of little cups-saucers and wheels, and above the triumphant announcement that tea is now 100 percent indigenous and hence okay to drink. The drawing style fuses elements of traditional Kalighat ‘*pat*’ painting with Jamini Roy artistry.

He later got associated with ‘**Signet Press**’ by D.K. Gupta. Bengali illustration have never got a Man like Ray, before him illustration and cover design was monotonous. It is here, that he designed covers for books like Jibanananda Das’s ‘*Banalata Sen*’, Nehru’s ‘*Discovery of India*’, Bibhutibhushan’s ‘*Aam Antir Bhepu*’. Sukumar Ray’s ‘*Abol Tabol*’ was also published by Signet Press. The main theme of the story found its way out in the cover design that Ray indulged in. The cover design of Sukumar Ray’s book “*KhaiKhai*” was groundbreaking (PinakiDe, 2021). They collectively breathed new life how we see covers as immediate part of the book itself.

Typography or typefaces were something Ray experimented with. Be it typing a document in words or printing a book, modern day publishers pay extra attention to the typefaces

they choose, for obvious reasons. There are a plethora of them available now but when Ray started his journey, things were different. He introduced his own typefaces. Some of them were named as ‘*Daphnis*’, ‘*RayBizarre*’, ‘*RayRoman*’ and ‘*Holiday Script*’. Out of these, *Ray Roman* was the most loved. Ray always attended to the sharpness in his fonts and readers ability to actually read them. Ray earned accolades for his contribution and often served as muse for **AIGA Eye on Design**, an international magazine. He redefined poster-making through the use of fonts and colours. His typefaces were not restricted to Bengali font but extended to English language as well, as is evident from the examples.

Sandesh Patrika

Sandesh- the magazine for kids, the founder editor of which was Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri was taken to its peak by Satyajit Ray (his grandson). Sukumar Ray started editing this magazine after his father, Upendrakishore passed away. The cover design and illustration after its revival was taken care of by Satyajit Ray. If one keenly goes through *Sandesh*, it will be striking to find how every festival, season, mood have had impact on the typefont of the magazine. Sometimes they speak, sometimes they are dressed as a ghost and at times they embody Indian culture, such were its variation. In his films too, ‘*Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*’ as in the role of ‘*Bhooter Raja*’, **letters** have played a huge role which audience connected with.

Ray’s one of the most popular creations- *Feluda*, *Jatayu* and *Topshe* (the trio) was sketched by his own hands, which showed the depth and precision he possessed in crafting a character. Most of the stories of *Feluda* series contained sketches by him along with its cover design.

Lights, Camera and Action

The three magical words that have always defined “cinema”, but is actually not restricted to these only. Ray’s film posters were narrative in nature, they abounded in knowledge and culture. Most of them were designed by Ray himself. Ray also had a history of “storyboarding” from which he could easily design a film script. His posters embodied typography, use of colours, mapping of the plot, characters and excellent illustrations instead of modern-day commercial posters where photography serves as the primitive element.

When things have started depending more and more on technology, AI, here Ray stands relevant and true to his mastery. The complete psychological aura used to get manifested in the posters he designed.

Ray for several years was the man of **page** and not screen. Starting with his first venture, ‘*Pather Panchali*’ adapted from Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay’s ‘*Aam Antir Bhepu*’, both the book and the poster design of the film was designed by Ray himself. In the year 1955, we saw the theatrical release of ‘*Pather Panchali*’.

The 1960 film ‘*Devi*’ was one of Ray’s genius where he blended science with faith in god. Just like the title of the movie ‘*Devi*’ which means goddess, the poster was designed accordingly with half-human and half-god face. This actually hints at the main plot and the tension of the story. His working in ad-agency highly helped him in the creative design and treatment of his films starting from scripting to poster design. In his movie, *Seemabaddha* the iconic *Peter* fans advertising was shown.

Similar instances were found in the posters of '*Charulata- the Lonely Wife*', '*Mahanagar- The Big City*', '*Nayak- The Hero*' where the themes of the following were brought in the most subtle fashion. An article by Sandip Ray, his son hints at his perfection of using amalgamation of photos and pages, leading to a collage.

His brushes and pen acted as the tools to his narrative depth. Contemporary society may find it difficult to fathom Ray's artistic style. It's still a mystery to any creative designer or graphic illustrator that how could he be so ahead of his time. His genius lay even in the costume design for his characters like *Goopy* and *Bagha*.

Life at Shantiniketan

The name Satyajit means "*conquerer of the truth*" just the way he conquered on world cinema platforms with his accurate and raw portrayal of Indian life. Tagore highly inspired Ray in his Art. It is in Viswa Bharati University, that Ray came across teachers like Nandalal Bose and Binode Behari Mukherjee, later he went on to direct documentaries centering the personalities. Nandalal's art had greatly inspired Ray, and that was evident in his later works in life. *Suprabha Devi*, Ray's mother was not willing to leave Ray for Shantiniketan but he made up his mind to carry his education under the "carefree" atmosphere of Viswa Bharati, away from the hubhub of life and eventually did so. He always carried Shantiniketan in him. Be it getting acquainted with more and more western forms of art or deeply indulging in the roots, Ray's personality was highly shaped here.

A Reluctant Photojournalist

"*Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder*" the famous proverb that every photographer abides by. Satyajit Ray was an underrated photojournalist who sought beauty in everyday life. He had a keen eye on elements that will make a complete film. Remember the scene from *Pather Panchali*?...where a man sitting just before a pond and the first rain drop will strike his bare head (*ataak*). The way he captured the minutest nuance still makes the makers wonder at his foresight. Ray had highly used natural settings in his movies.

Most of Satyajit Ray's films were in monochrome, however for the first time he used colour in his 1962 film '*Kanchenjunga*'. Ray documented time and space in his movies. The visual impact that his black and white movies had is still the talk of the town! He is often into *calligraphy* for his films, smoking a cigar or instructing the collaborators. The way he sketched every ounce of his film and how attentively he listened to every actor enacting their characters were priceless. Cinema became an extension of his drawing. If one rummages through all "Ray" films, photography blended with high cinematic sense is bound to be found. Ray viewed his scenes differently where numerous sketches and storyboards have deeply helped him in this respect. He strived for the best and eventually brought out the essence in his films. The characters were made humane with the proper use of lights, camera angle and a frame. He had a huge grip on the **camera movements**. While filming "*Ganashatru*", a film shot indoors, the adequate use of frame and angle condensed with time and space can be found.

Modern day relevance

What Satyajit Ray started in the 1940s is continued till date. Typography, illustration has progressed a lot with technology acting as the driving force behind its growth. Technology is

known to save time but does it actually replace human creation? There's not a single ad agency to be found who does not worship Ray's inputs into illustration. Packaging in products has become increasingly important, the reason behind book covers made much attractive. Long before things were done by Ray in the most pleasant approach. The struggle of advertisements to earn revenue is huge, the market is open for all, to engage in competition and fight for their way out.

In typography, million type fonts have been in use since then, available through a lot many software. Software's have made things easy but can never take place of a man-made creation. There's a big question on the preservation of the type fonts and its use in today's society extensively as invented by Ray owing to a huge transition from analog to digital. One can get down to the archives in order to keep a track. The idea of preserving every mood and detail with which a story is written through its cover design was typical of Ray which major ad illustrators are still working on.

The ad agency that Ray started his journey with – Keymer is now in popular parlance called 'Ogilvy', one of the most renowned ad houses, known to house the best creative talents of all time, designing slogans and ad copies.

Storyboarding or copywriting were something that Ray had already contributed to through films and literature both. These form absolutely core elements in advertising. Storyboarding actually depict what the scenes will be like, the sequence that is to follow, giving the highlights of a scene. Ray remains immortal in our hearts through his extensive grip on "Media" and its components. His *multi-dimensional* persona remains relevant to the global *mediascape*.

Factual evidences on how his work served as documents for the advertising world is missing. It is mostly because ad campaigns were undertaken by a team, so any single person contributing to the work isn't identified. The main struggle an artist face is staying relevant over time, where Ray succeeds. His works till date is researched by modern technology based platforms and there is an ardent struggle to bring the Art forms back again. As society is becoming increasingly dependent on technology, we find solace in Ray's creations which are pure, raw and vulnerable, open to human emotions. There are a lot many artists who inspired Ray in his journey and have got inspired themselves after learning about the world of Ray. There are techniques which were popularized by Ray. No wonder why he is called the *maestro*. Art in his times were not pursued for mere commercial gains, it was much beyond that, which is missing in today's medias cape. The pressure to produce more of it is somewhere lowering down its actual credibility.

Workcited

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