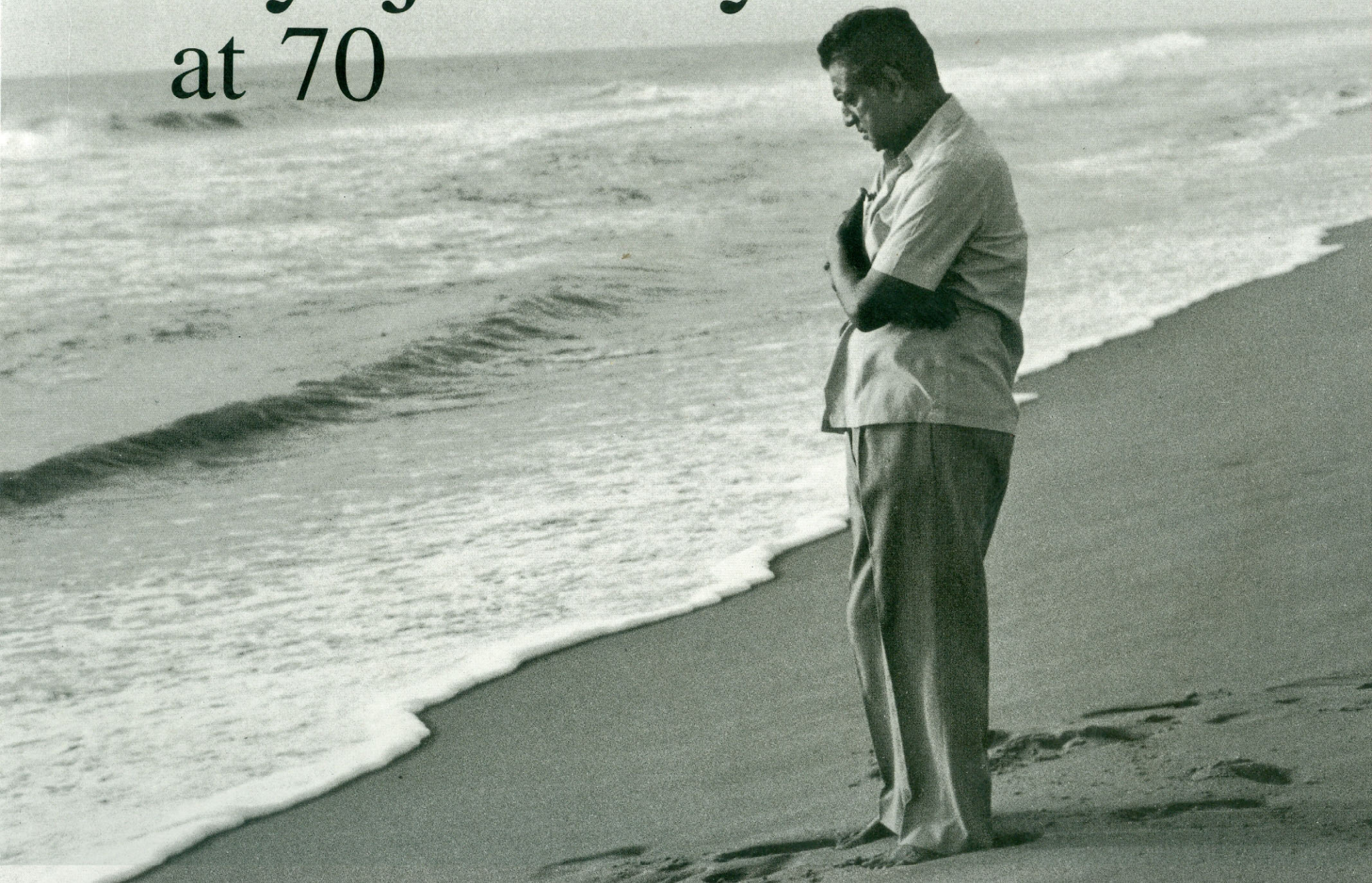


# Satyajit Ray

at 70



PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEMAI GHOSH  
FOREWORD BY HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON

CONTRIBUTIONS COLLECTED BY ALOK B. NANDI

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# Satyajit Ray at 70

as

Writer  
Designer  
Actor  
Director  
Cameraman  
Editor  
Composer

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EIFFEL Editions

# FOREWORD

Nemai Ghosh, a friend of Satyajit Ray for twenty years, is his photo-biographer.

In this collection, through his visual gift, he allows us to be intimate with film-making, and to feel with great fidelity the drive, the alertness and the profundity of this giant of cinema in all his majestic stature.

*Henri Cartier-Bresson*

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON

Well before I was introduced to the cinema by Satyajit Ray I was an avid reader of his stories. The expectancy with which I look forward to them grows with the years. In 1985 it was delightfully augmented by an experience in England I want to share on the occasion of the maestro's seventieth birthday.

It was a crisp sunny summer afternoon in Cambridge. I happened to be present at a symposium on the interplay between the physical and biological sciences in understanding the functioning of the human brain. After a couple of overview talks a technical session was scheduled which I felt would be too specialised, and I was about to go out for a break. Then someone stood up and said: 'A puzzle has been bothering me for a long time — what makes human beings capable of laughter, a characteristic unique among all nature's creatures? What special characteristic of the human brain gives rise to this curious behaviour?' I was immediately struck; there flashed into my mind the very same question posed in one of my favourite Ray stories, 'Ashamanja Babu's Dog', about a Calcuttan and his pet dog Brownie who could laugh. The story has now been published in English, but I had read it in Bengali when I was on the verge of embarking on my career as a physicist: and I had been deeply stirred by the way Ray had woven into a fascinating tale a touch of profundity.

As the story gently unfolds Ray reveals how meticulously and systematically Ashamanja Babu notes Brownie's behaviour and draws conclusions from it — the scientific methodology in practice. The dog doesn't laugh at funny remarks, only at funny incidents; it never laughs without a reason ('To laugh without reason was a sign of madness'); it laughs precisely seventeen times during four months. Nevertheless, Ashamanja Babu's account is scoffed at by a learned professor who says that 'None of God's creatures laugh except human beings' and who adds that it is 'not clearly understood why human beings should laugh.'

A well-known vet is equally resistant to the claims in Ashamanja Babu's report. Here, I thought, was Ray's perceptive criticism of all-pervasive conservative intellectual attitudes. Over the years, as I have become increasingly involved in research, I have become acutely aware of this 'hard reality'. I cannot resist a quote from Sherlock Holmes (someone loved by Satyajit Ray): 'it is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts... The difficulty is to detach the framework of fact — of absolute undeniable fact — from the embellishment of theorists.'

The question raised at the Cambridge symposium caused extensive, animated, scholastic discussion to sprout, at the end of which it was abundantly clear that 'laughter is really mysterious'. Afterwards I enjoyed a memorable moment of pride telling the participants that I came from a city where there lived an outstanding film-maker of our

time whose multi-faceted creative pursuits also produced stories of insight, transcending sheer entertainment, delving into puzzles of nature such as the one we had just vigorously debated in the historic setting of Cambridge University.

*D. Home*

DIPANKAR HOME  
Bari, Italy

I have a fascination for Satyajit Ray's films. My first experience of them was *Pather Panchali*. I was so taken with it that I sketched many drawings inspired by it. The world of the Bengali villagers stirred me. My 1986 exhibition 'From Gitanjali to Pather Panchali' was my tribute to Ray's film.

From his sketches and notes for his films, I see his sense of design, his obsession with detail which is visible in all his films. There is never an extra frame, never a superfluous image. Only a sense of perfect balance.

He has drawn faces, how he thought various characters in his films should look. Perhaps he drew them and afterwards selected actors who were the precise fit.

In his sketches of costumes I see the care that goes into his use of colour; his orchestration of colour is painterly, similar to the work of the French film-maker Godard. Colour is not mere embellishment. It has a greater purpose; it has identity.

Colour in cinema is in general not as advanced. Blues and reds are not separate; they reflect each other, producing shades of pink and purple. Red should be seen as red, blue as blue.

I once met Ray in a shop of rare film books, on Tottenham Court Road in London. He was making *Distant Thunder* at the time. He told me I should see the film because I would love the colour and he was right. What more can I say?