

THE PRODUCTION

It's a throwback to the works of Satyajit Ray, his father Sukumar Ray and grandfather Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury. "Satyajit has always been my hero. I have also read almost all works by Sukumar Ray and Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury. We wanted to hold up the Ray family to the Western audience. Most of them don't know much about these three creative geniuses, especially about Upendrakishore and Sukumar Ray," said Bhaskar Dasgupta, who has been living in the UK since 1983 and is now a consultant at Southend University Hospital.

Rays of Light opens with a Brahma Sangeet, *Jago Purabasi*, written by Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury. Then clippings of an interview where Satyajit Ray talks about how he treated films as music concerts were screened.

Some photographs such as Upendrakishore playing the violin and some paintings of Sukumar Ray were also screened.

Bhaskar translated a few poems of Sukumar Ray to make the western audience understand the essence of his writings. He turned the poem *Ayre Bhola Kheyal Khola* from *Abol Tabol* into a song and used it in the production. He wrote a song on the lines of *Bhooter raja dilo bor*, depicting three Rays as "tin bor".

The production portrayed the connection between western and Indian literature through nonsense poetry. Both *Jabberwocky* by Lewis Carroll and *Jabarkhaki* by Satyajit were recited to depict the similarities. Sukumar Ray's *Abol Tabol* poems were also recited while his own paintings in the book were projected on the screen.

The first half of the production ended with the recitation of Sukumar Ray's last poem, *Megh Muluke Jhapsa Ratey*, while a famous painting by Vincent Van Gogh was used with graphics as the backdrop.

"We wanted to find out a common thread that can bind the three Rays together and we keep Raja as a common theme for three Rays. Their Raja is not a despot, but rather a human, slightly comical figure full of frailties and vanities," said Bhaskar.

The *Abol Tabol* poems by Sukumar Ray, some scenes from Satyajit's *Jalsaghar* and *Shatranj Ke Khilari* and Upendrakishore's *Tuntunir Golpo* were staged to depict the theme of Raja. *Jalsaghar* and *Shatranj Ke Khilari* were recreated with song, dance and drama in short sequences.

However, the production also focused on Satyajit Ray's works involving common people and relationships. In the second half of the show, the curtain went up with the signature background score of *Pather Panchali*. "Films such as *Pather Panchali*, *Charulata*, *Monihara* and *Devi* had a huge impact on us Bengalis. So we tried to portray the essence of those films through the enactment of few scenes," said the doctor.

Scenes from Satyajit Ray's documentary *Bala* that was based on the story of Bharatanatyam dancer T. Balasaraswati were also enacted.

Little girls dance to *Bhooter raja dilo bor*Bipashyee Ghosh recites *Megh Muluke Jhapsa Ratey*, a poem by Sukumar RaySutapa Biswas dances to the song, *Aha ki anondo aakashy bataashey*A Kathak dance by Indrani Datta to *Pilu thumri*, sung by Shruti Dasgupta in the show, in the *Jalsaghar* sequence

The production concluded with the poignant scene of Durga's death from *Pather Panchali*.

THE PEOPLE

Bhaskar Dasgupta is the brain behind the production along with his wife Dalia, the director of human resources at Queen Mary University, London.

Bhaskar also acted in a few sequences of the production. He

Bhaskar Dasgupta as Nawab Wajid Ali Shah in a sequence from *Shatranj ke Khilari*

Bengal couple Bhaskar and Dalia Dasgupta staged *Rays of Light*, a fan tribute to Satyajit Ray, his father Sukumar Ray and grandfather Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury, at The Bhavan in London and won the hearts of Indians as well as Westerners. *Young Metro* takes a look at the production, the people behind it and the relevance of the show for the young generation...



Timeless Rays

The curtain call at the end of the cultural collage, *Rays of Light*Enactment of a *Pather Panchali* sequence with Apu, Durga and SarbjayaBipashyee Ghosh recites *Jabarkhaki* by Satyajit RayA scene from *Shatranj ke Khilari*Nick Howard and Pori Acharya in *Tuntunir Golpo*

played the role of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah in the scene from *Shatranj ke Khilari* where Nawab gave up his crown singing his own composition *Jab dhor chale Lucknow nagari*. He also acted as Harihar in the *Pather Panchali* sequence.

"The show's emphasis was on bringing in young ones. We had children performing *Abol Tabol*, *Bhooter Raja*, *Tuntuni and Raja*, stories from *Ha Ja Ba Ra La*, excerpt from *Pather Panchali* with Durga, Harihar and Sarbjaya — the entire show was dedicated to the Ray family's fascination with children's literature. It was the modern version of *Sandesh* periodical that all three of them edited," said Bhaskar.

Dalia sang three songs for the production and played a key role in choosing songs and poems and deciding "who will do what" for the show.

"We always wanted to keep Indian culture and music alive in our family. I had also run a music school, Chhandam, in London for 15 years. We couldn't continue with it but at least we make sure that we stage one or two productions every year," said Dalia, who is very passionate about Indian classical music. "This time we wanted to do something that has a strong Bengali connection as well

as universality. When we were rehearsing for the production, we actually found out that people became more interested in knowing about Sukumar and Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury." Around 30 people — including a few children and Bhaskar and Dalia's family and friends in London who all are busy with their own professions and are "mostly matured amateur artistes" — come together to stage the show.

"We have been performing together for a few years. We all sit together once or twice a month to pursue our cultural interest. We were the first group to stage *Mahalaya* in London in 1999. Before *Rays of Light*, we staged *Phoolwalon ki Sair* (The flowerseller's pageant) two years ago. That was based on a beautiful but little-known story from Indian history," said the 67-year-old doctor who is an alumnus of Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, Pondicherry, and All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi.

Bhaskar and Dalia's daughter Shruti, a solicitor, amazed everyone with three songs, especially *Shmashane jagichhe Shyama Ma* that she learnt after listening to Ajoy Chakrabarty's rendition on

YouTube, and their son Deep, an economist, recited poems in the show. He also played the role of Feluda in a scene from *Napoleon Er Chithi*.

"Classical singing is very close to my heart though I don't get much time now to practise. I didn't have much idea about the works of the Rays, but I have learnt a lot about them while working for this production," said Shruti, who was born and raised in London.

OTHER PLAYERS

Nick Howard, a police detective in London, played the role of General James Outram in the scene from *Shatranj Ke Khilari* that was originally played by Richard Attenborough in the film.

"I got associated with Bhaskar Dasgupta a couple of years ago and working with him was a great learning experience. I had never read Sukumar Ray's poems and now, after reciting the translation of *Megh Muluke* for the show, I fell in love with it," said Howard.

For Tim Robinson, director of a pharmaceutical company and the graphic designer of the production, *Rays of Light* helped him explore Satyajit's films. "I had very little knowledge about Ray's films before I started researching for this show and I found his films so fascinating that I would like to see all his films," said the 29-year-old. Robinson played the role of Captain Weston in the *Shatranj Ke Khilari* scene that was played by Tom Alter in the film. He learnt Hindi from Bhaskar and recited an Urdu poetry, written by Wajid Ali Shah, for the sequence.

AUDIENCE REACTION

Madeline Whitlock, a nurse specialist at Southend University Hospital who was in the audience, said: "For me it was an explosion of brilliance. It was a visual delight with music, dance and acting. I hadn't read or seen any of the three Rays' works and this show introduced me to the magical creations of three geniuses. I loved the story of *Tuntunir Golpo* and it sparked my interest in the Rays."

For Soumya Dasgupta, it was a trip down memory lane. "I have seen a lot of live shows, from *jatras* in Bolpur and operas in Vienna to *Lion King* in Singapore and *Cirque du Soleil* shows, but nothing comes close to this show. It struck me most probably because I'm a Bengali. This show took me back in time, with such a matured performance. I wish this show is back on the stage every week," said Soumya, who is a senior data scientist, currently working in London, and also the president of Kolkata-Manchester United Supporters Club.

Text by Ayan Paul
Picture courtesy: Soumya Dasgupta