

“Pather Panchali” starring Kanu Bannerjee, Karuna Bannerjee, Subir Banerjee, 1955, NR, 125 minutes

Major themes:

- Wonder
- Delight
- Childhood
- Family
- Daily life
- Poverty
- Despair
- Loss
- Innocence
- Hope
- Community
- Courage
- Life

Major characters:

- Harihar Roy (father)
- Sarbajaya Roy (mother)
- Durga (daughter)
- Apu (son)
- Indir Thakrun (elderly aunt)

Background info:

- The surname of three of the main actors happened to be Banerjee, but they were not related to each other.
- Director Satyajit Ray said that the 1948 Italian film "*Bicycle Thieves*" (a.k.a. "*The Bicycle Thief*") had a profound impact on him, leading him to believe that it was possible to make realistic cinema that was shot on location with an amateur cast. This was his first film.
- This was the first film from independent India to attract major international critical attention and won many awards, including the Best Human Document award at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival. It is often featured in lists of the greatest films ever made.
- The Bengali-language film is based on Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's 1929 Bengali novel of the same name. It is set in the village of Nischindipur, West Bengal, India. Most of the filming was done at Boral, then a small village on the outskirts of Kolkata. The soundtrack was composed by sitar player Ravi Shankar.
- The Bengali word "*path*" literally means path, and *pather* means "*of the path*". Panchali is a form of narrative folk or religious songs or stories in the Bengal region (which is located in India and Bangladesh). English translations of the Bengali title include "*Song of the Little Road*", "*The Lament of the Path*", "*Song of the Road*", and "*Song of the Open Road*".
- *Saccharum spontaneum* (wild sugarcane) is a perennial grass native to India. In Bengal it is commonly known as "*kash*".
- A band in this film plays, "*It's a Long Way to Tipperary*," a 1912 British music hall song that became popular as a marching song among soldiers in World War I and is now remembered as a song associated with that war.
- Ray ran out of money partway through filming, which had to be suspended for nearly a year. He later admitted that the delays had made him tense and that three miracles saved the film: "*One, Apu's voice did not break. Two, Durga did not grow up. Three, Indir Thakrun did not die.*"

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Scriptures:

Psalm 9:1-2 (The Message) – *“I’m thanking you, God, from a full heart, I’m writing the book on your wonders. I’m whistling, laughing, and jumping for joy; I’m singing your song, High God.”*

Psalm 40:5 (The Message) – *“The world’s a huge stockpile of God-wonders and God-thoughts. Nothing and no one comes close to you! I start talking about you, telling what I know, and quickly run out of words. Neither numbers nor words account for you.”*

Psalm 104:24-31 (The Message) – *“What a wildly wonderful world, God! You made it all, with Wisdom at your side, made earth overflow with your wonderful creations. Oh, look—the deep, wide sea, brimming with fish past counting, sardines and sharks and salmon. Ships plow those waters, and Leviathan, your pet dragon, romps in them. All the creatures look expectantly to you to give them their meals on time. You come, and they gather around; you open your hand and they eat from it. If you turned your back, they’d die in a minute—take back your Spirit and they die, revert to original mud; send out your Spirit and they spring to life—the whole countryside in bloom and blossom. The glory of God—let it last forever!”*

Matthew 18:2-5 (NLT) – *“Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. Then he said, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me.’”*

Romans 8:15 (The Message) – *“This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It’s adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike ‘What’s next, Papa?’ God’s Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children.”*

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Discussion points:

1. To be human is to have hopes and dreams. What hopes and dreams stood out the most to you in this film?
2. It has been said that Apu (the son) had repeated epiphanies of wonder. Which were the most moving to you?
3. What can we learn from the relationships between Durga (the daughter) and Apu, and between Durga and Indir (the elderly aunt)?
4. Laura Ingalls Wilder, author of the “Little House” books, said, *“The real things haven't changed. It is still best to be honest and truthful; to make the most of what we have; to be happy with simple pleasures; and have courage when things go wrong.”* What simple pleasures did you notice in this film?
5. What messages do you think each of the main characters needed to hear?
6. What similarities did you notice between the way of life experienced by the characters in this film and your own? What differences were most noticeable to you?
7. What do you appreciate most about this film? What was the most challenging aspect of this film for you?