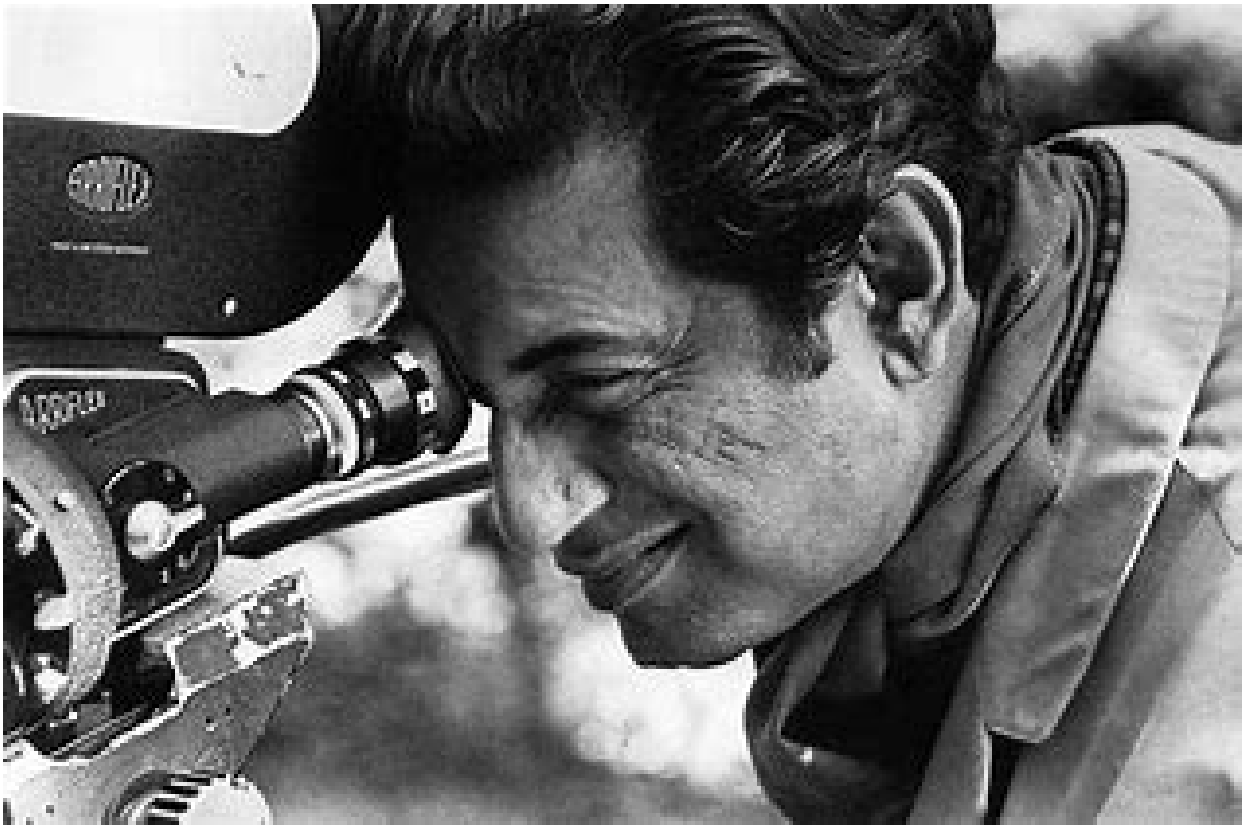
About Amrita Pritam / Kanika Aurora

The bonds and conventions of society are certainly reflected in my poetry, negatively, of course. But I think every intelligent person has to suffer…Suffering is the price the intelligent person has to pay. As for women, I feel that women in literature are different from women in other fields…Basically; there is a prejudice against women in literature. Men take women's writing lightly; they doubt a women's sincerity. For example, when I got this Sahitya Akademi Award, and with it fame, the leading English daily in Delhi wrote that I got my popularity in Punjabi literature because of my youth and beauty. I felt very sorry to read that. Why not talent? They can admire a beautiful woman, but not a talented one."

Remembering Ray | Kanika Aurora



Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem in the autograph book of young Satyajit whom he met in idyllic Shantiniketan.

The poem, translated in English, reads: ‘Too long I’ve wandered from place to place/Seen mountains and seas at vast expense/Why haven’t I stepped two yards from my house/Opened my eyes and gazed very close/At a glistening drop of dew on a piece of paddy grain?’

Years later, Satyajit Ray the celebrated Renaissance Man, captured this beauty, which is just two steps away from our homes but which we fail to appreciate on our own in many of his masterpieces stunning the audience with his gritty, neo realistic films in which he wore several hats- writing all his screenplays with finely detailed sketches of shot sequences and experimenting in lighting, music, editing and incorporating unusual camera angles. Several of his films were based on his own stories and his appreciation of classical music is fairly apparent in his music compositions resulting in some rather distinctive signature Ray tunes collaborating with renowned classical musicians such as Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar and Vilayat Khan.

No surprises there. Born a hundred years ago in 1921 in an extraordinarily talented Bengali Brahmo family, Satyajit Ray carried forward his illustrious legacy with astonishing ease and finesse.

Both his grandfather Upendra Kishore RayChaudhuri and his father Sukumar RayChaudhuri are extremely well known children's writers. It is said that there is hardly any Bengali child who has not grown up listening to or reading Upendra Kishore's stories about the feisty little bird Tuntuni or the musicians Goopy Gyne and Bagha Byne. He also launched Sandesh, perhaps the first children's magazine in India. Satyajit revived it in 1961 and it is currently available online as well.

He also established the Calcutta Film Society in 1947 with some like mind friends and film enthusiasts; the first film club of its kind in India, dedicated to watching and discussing the best of world cinema.

Pather Panchali (The Song of the Road), directed by Satyajit Ray is rightly considered as one of the greatest landmarks in Indian film history, placing our country firmly on the world's cinematic map inspiring several generations of film directors.

After watching Vittorio De Sica's Bicycle Thieves, he recalled his emotions in a lecture in 1984. The film had "gored" him. "I came out of the theatre with my mind firmly made up. I would become a filmmaker. The prospect of giving up a job didn't daunt me any more. I would make my film exactly as De Sica had made his: working with non-professional actors, using modest resources, and shooting on actual locations."

"I was familiar with the camera, possessing a second-hand Leica. And paying homage to a photographer I considered to be the greatest of all—Henri Cartier-Bresson—I wanted my film to look as if it was shot with available light a la Cartier-Bresson… I had absolutely no doubt in my mind that I would

become a filmmaker, starting my career with Pather Panchali. If it didn't work out, I would be back at my desk at Keymer's, tail between my legs. But if it did work, there would be no stopping me." (My Years with Apu.)

But there was no money to make the film. After failing to procure the bare minimum amount required to even contemplate filming, Ray decided to ask some of his friends to contribute a thousand rupees each. The budget of the film had been fixed at ₹ 70,000. He collected ₹ 17,000, and started filming in the October of 1952. The very first sequence that was shot is perhaps the most iconic of the film: Apu and his elder sister Durga running through a field of kaash flowers to see a train for the first time in their lives.

Pandit Ravi Shankar would provide the music and Subrata Mitra was the 21-year-old cinematographer who had never operated a motion picture camera before this. Today he is acknowledged in the cinema world as one of the finest ever to operate a movie camera.

The rest as they say is history.

Pather Panchali went to the Cannes Film Festival and there is a popular anecdote about how initially it was exhibited late at night at a small theatre with less than a dozen people watching including Francois Truffaut, then a critic who would eventually go one to become a great film director, leaving the hall within 10 minutes, bored by the slow pace of the film. Truffaut later apologized several times and Ray and he became good friends.

Lotte Eisner, who would go on to become the chief curator of the Cinematheque Francaise, as Providence would have it decided that the film deserved a second screening. She lobbied and campaigned for it, resulting in a second show which was well attended and Pather Panchali won the special jury prize for the 'Best Human Document'.

Ray could now become a full-time film director. He started work on Pather Panchali's sequel Aparajito (The Unvanquished), which depicts Apu's teenage years is arguably the finest and most touching film of the Apu trilogy.

Although the first film he wanted to make was Ghare Baire, the one that got made was of course, Pather Panchali. An adaptation of Tagore's 1916 novel, Ghare Baire (The Home and the World) eventually did get made in 1984 and got nominated for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival that year.

In 1982, delivering a lecture, Ray spoke about his work.

"There is a special problem that faces one who must talk about films. Lectures on art should ideally be illustrated. One who talks on paintings usually comes armed with slides and a projector. This solves the difficulty of having to describe in words, what must be seen with the eyes. The lecturer on music must bless the silicon revolution, which enables him to cram all his examples into a cassette no bigger than a small bar of chocolate. But the lecturer on cinema has no such advantage—at least not in the present state of technology in our country. If he wishes to cite an example, he can do no more than give a barely adequate description in words, of what is usually perceived with all one's senses. A film is pictures, a film is words, a film is movement, a film is drama, a film is music, a film is a story, a film is a thousand expressive aural and visual details. These days one must also add that film is colour. Even a segment of film that lasts barely a minute can display all these aspects simultaneously. You will realize what a hopeless task it is to describe a scene from a film in words. They can't even begin to do justice to a language which is so complex."

Ray thought of cinema as a language. "Cinema is images and sound," he said.

"The problem," he wrote, "was over the word 'art'. If the word

‘language’ was used instead, I think the true nature of cinema will become clearer and there will be no need for debate.” Cinema was a language defined by fade-ins, and fade-outs, camera angles, clever editing and quick cuts complemented by classical music.

Composing music for his films was essential to him too. “How interesting to know… that film and music had so much in common!” he wrote (Speaking of Films). “Both unfold over a period of time; both are concerned with pace and rhythm and contrast; both can be described in terms of mood—sad, cheerful, pensive, boisterous, tragic, jubilant.”

Ray had mastered the art of conveying the message without actually making it explicitly obvious. In Apur Sansar, for instance, the audience gets a sense of the intimacy and comfort that Apu (the incredibly gifted Soumitra Chatterjee, who passed away recently and worked with Ray in fourteen films) and his wife Aparna (Sharmila Tagore in her first film role, who was apparently expelled from her convent school for appearing in a film) enjoy from the little sequences like Apu waking up in the morning, looking decidedly happy and satiated, opening his packet of cigarettes and finding a note by Aparna inside, asking him not to smoke too much.

Ray also ensures that women in his movies exhibit dignity and courage in the face of adversities.

Charulata, based on a Tagore novella called Nashtaneer, whose literal translation is The Ruined Nest (home in this instance) with the English title, The Lonely Wife is a masterpiece by any standards.

The opening sequence which establishes her soul destroying loneliness with no dialogues is fascinating and portrays her unique disposition in seven minutes of near silent shots.

In Ray’s own words the seven minutes were about (from Speaking Of Films) attempting to use a language entirely free from

literary and theatrical influences. Except for one line of dialogue in its seven minutes, the scene says what it has to say in terms that speak to the eye and the ear.

Madhabi Mukherjee, his rumoured muse and more accomplished the job with practiced ease in the scene which is still etched in his fans' collective memory; the embroidery, the chiming of the grandfather clock, casual lifting of the piano lid and striking a note; the monkey man, the palki, lorgnette and all.

Another personal favourite is her swinging gaily with fairly unusual camera angles and positioning perhaps influence by his mentor Renoir's A Day in the Country. So is the brilliant montage announcing the arrival of rains in Pather Panchali.

Everyone has a list of their cherished sequence, I daresay from scores of profound, layered and thematically rich Ray films, such as Jalsaghar, Devi or The Calcutta Trilogy: Pratidwandi, Seemabaddha & Jana Aranya.

One is spoilt for choice out of his 28 films which he directed in over four decades.

Most of these are based on classic Bengali literary works, and two; Shatranj Ke Khilari and the telefilm Sadgati on stories written by Munshi Premchand. Others are based on contemporary novels and short stories, and some, like Kanchanjungha and Nayak are original scripts written by Ray himself. One of his last films, Ganashatru was inspired by Ibsen's play, An Enemy of The People.

A few of his films like Parash Pathar (The Philosopher's Stone), and the two Feluda detective novels of his which he made into film—Sonar Kella (The Golden Fortress) and Joi Baba Felunath (The Elephant God) are breezy and immensely entertaining. His two Goopy-Bagha films, Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne and Hirak Rajar Deshe (The Kingdom of Diamonds) delighted the children as musicals.

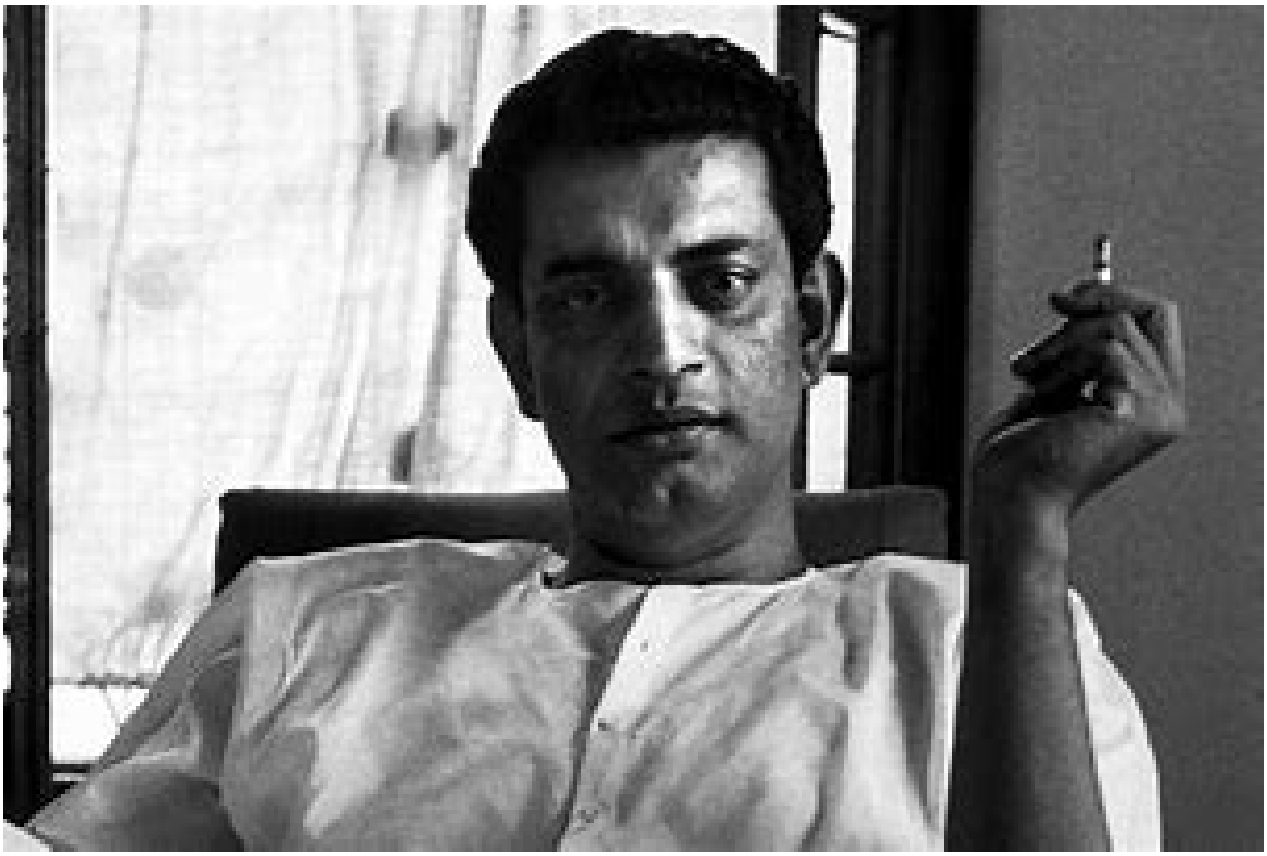
A little known fact about Ray is that without knowing it, he was indeed the first “graphic designer” in India. He even designed two English typefaces -Ray Roman and Ray Bizarre.

One of the most influential, multi-faceted and greatest filmmakers of all times, Satyajit Ray mastered the art of telling intimate human stories, the journey, the trials and tribulations of the ordinary men and women with extraordinary expertise embodying and showcasing the magic of cinema at its very best.

To recognize his enormous contributions to cinema, he was awarded the Academy Honorary Award days before his death. He was also awarded India’s highest civilian honour Bharat Ratna by the Government of India

The legendary Japanese auteur Akira Kurosawa one famously remarked about Ray, “Not to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing in the world without seeing the sun or the moon.”

Satyajit Ray shall forever continue to illuminate and inspire.



Faiz Forever / Kanika Aurora

Gulon mein rang bhare

Baad-e-naubahaar chale

Chale bhi aao ki

Gulshan ka karobaar chale

Come bahaar or spring and we all end up quoting Faiz Ahmed Faiz conjuring up evocative and tantalizing images of a riot of flowers bursting with a million hues beseeching your beloved to come so the garden can get on with its business of blossoming.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz , the romantic, revolutionary poet extraordinaire was born in Sialkot a hundred and ten years ago

on February 13th, 1911 . He shared his hometown with Pakistan’s national poet, Allama Muhammad Iqbal.

Linguistically, and culturally he belonged to Urdu, but Faiz Saheb was also well-acquainted with Punjabi and English; he composed some poetry in Punjabi and earned a Master’s degree in English literature as well as served as a lecturer of English and British Literature for a time at the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Amritsar (in present-day Punjab, India).An uncle of mine was recently speaking about the junoon he caused when he came to visit.

Interestingly, during his time in Amritsar, Faiz also met his future wife Alys in 1938 at the house of a colleague at the college.Faiz and Alys shared the ideals of freedom and love for humanity and justice, and even though in some ways they had the opposing temperaments, they eventually fell in love.They married in Srinagar in October 1941 and their nikah was performed by Sher-i-Kashmir, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, the leader of the National Conference.It is a little known fact that Alys had been christened Kulsoom, by Faiz’s mother and ‘Dast e Saba’ which was written during his imprisonment with the above mentioned ghazal was dedicated to her making everyone wonder about the identity of this mystery woman.

Ishq dil mein rahe to rusva ho

Lab pe aye to raaz ho jaaye

Typical Faiz. Once an emotion or an idea is rendered into poetic expression, it perhaps acquires a multiplicity of meanings and gets shrouded in ambiguities,

During his lifetime, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature and even received the Lenin Peace Prize, awarded by the Soviet Union, in 1962.Posthumously, he was conferred his nation’s highest civil award, Nishan-e-Imtiaz, in 1990 although during his lifetime he remained in conflict with the Pakistani government.

Faiz’s early poems had been fairly conventional, romantic treatises on beauty and love, but while in Lahore he began to expand into politics and community concerns. In 1942, he left teaching to join the British Indian Army, for which he received a British Empire Medal for his service during World War II. After the partition of India in 1947, Faiz resigned from the army and became the editor of The Pakistan Times, a socialist English-language newspaper.

Poetry has the ability to rouse and soothe, lull and awaken our weary souls. Faiz’s poems especially, have a remarkable ability and the potential to transcend borders, religions, language and culture. They are an important thread that attempts to suture the hopes and beliefs of peace seeking souls of the sub-continent helping us imagine how to create new futures.

Yeh daagh daagh ujaalaa, yeh shab gazidaa seher
Woh intezaar tha jiska, yeh woh seher to nahin
Yeh woh seher to nahin, jis ki aarzoo lekar
Chale the yaar ki mil jaayegi kahin na kahin
Falak ke dasht mein taaron ki aakhri manzil
Kahin to hogaa shab-e-sust mauj ka saahil
Kahin to jaa ke rukegaa safinaa-e-gham-e-dil

These immortal lines expressed his anguish and dismay at the colossal cost the Indian subcontinent had to pay for freedom from the British Empire in 1947. The poem is entitled *Subh-e-Azaadi*.

This stained blemished light—this dawn
Surely this wasn’t what we we’ve all been longing for.
Not the morning we had set out to find
In the wilderness of the skies, the stars final resting place

Somewhere there was hope that weary waves will find their shore
Our sorrow laden ship would at last come home to anchor…

Faiz ended the poem with these lines:
Abhi giraani-e shab mein kami nahin aai
Nijaat -e-deeda o dil ki ghadi nahin aai
Chaley chalo ke wo manzil abhi nahin aai.

The Night's heaviness has not yet lessened
The moment of salvation for our hearts and eyes has not yet arrived;
So let us go on, that destination is yet to come….

He was imprisoned twice (1951-1955, then for over 5 months in 1958-1959) for his support of leftist politics in Pakistan. He eventually fled to Moscow and spent some of his last years in Beirut.
Woh baat saaray fasanaay mein jis kaa zikr na tha…
Woh baat unko bahut na-gawar guzri hai…

In his poem Intesab, he writes:
Aaj ke naam
Aur Aaj ke gham ke naam
Aaj ka gham ki hai zindagi ke bhare gulistaan se khafaa
Zard patton ka ban
Zard patton ka ban jo mera desh hai
Dard ki anjuman jo mera desh hai

Let me write a poem for this day
This day and the anguish of this day
The sorrow that does not acknowledge life's beauty
For the wilderness of dying. dry leaves which is my homeland
For the carnival of suffering which is my homeland….

Some of his finest work, however was written during his imprisonment.
"Aaj bazaar mein pa ba jaulan chalo" ("Let us walk with fetters in the street") which has a rather fascinating incident associated with it.
It is said that when Faiz was being taken from the jail in Lahore, in chains, to a dentist's office in a horse cart

(tonga) through the familiar streets, people recognized him and began following his tonga.
Chashm e nam jaan e shorida kaafi nahin
Tohmat e ishq e poshida kaafi nahin..
Tearful eyes and a restless soul are sadly not enough. Being charged for concealing love is also not enough, he wrote.

Another glittering gem of a poem, Zindaan ki Ek Shaam has been exquisitely translated by Agha Shahid Ali.

Shaam ke pecho-kham sitaron se
Zeena-zeena utar rahi hai raat
Yun saba paas se guzarti hai
Jaise keh di kisi ne pyaar ki baat.
Sahne-zindan ke be-vatan ashjar

Sar-nigun mahw hain banane mein
Daman-e-aasman pe naqsh-o-nigaar.
Shaan-e-baam par damakta hai
Meherban chandni ka dast-e-jameel
Khaak mein dhul gayi hai aab-e-nujoom
Noor mein dhul gaya hai arsh ka neel
Sabz goshon mein nil-gun saaye
Lahlahate hain jis tarah dil mein
Mauj-e-dard-e-firaq-e-yaar aaye.

Dil se paiham khayal kahta hai
Itni shireen hai zindagi is pal
Zulm ka zahar gholne wale
Kamran ho sakenge aaj na kal
Jalva gaah e-visaal ki shamein
Vo bujha bhi chuke agar to kya
Chand ko gul karen to hum jaane.

A Prison Evening trancreated by Agha Shahid Ali proceeds as follows:

Stars spiral into the evening –
staircase the night descends –

and the wind comes near, then passes,
as though someone spoke of love.
In the courtyard, the trees are exiles
who keep themselves busy
embroidering the sky.
The roof shines; the moon
scatters light with generous hands;

the glory of the stars mingles with dust
and light polishes the blue sky silver.
In every corner shadows ebb and advance,
as though the heart were lifted

by a wave of separation.
This is the thought the heart returns to:
that life, in this moment, is sweet.
Let tyrants prepare their poisons,
they will never succeed.
They may snuff out the lamps
in the rooms of lovers,
but can they extinguish the moon?

“Going to Jail”, Faiz once famously said, “was like falling in love once again”.
And lest we forget, very few poets express love in its myriad mysterious, mystical and mesmerizing moods as Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

Raat yun dil mein teri khoyi hui yaad aayi
Jaise veerane mein chupke se bahaar aa jaaye
Jaise saharaon mein haule se chale baad e naseem

Jaise beemar ko bewajah qaraar aa jaaye

Translated by Vikram Seth it reads:

Last night your faded memory came to me
As in the wilderness spring comes quietly,
As, slowly, in the desert, moves the breeze,
As, to a sick man, without cause, comes peace.

Other iconic poems such as Raqib se, Rang Dil Ka Hai Mere and Mujh se pehli si mohabbat Mere Mehboob na Maang have attained almost cult status in the hearts and minds of his followers.

Faiz shall continue to be celebrated for his poetry, his ideology and his unmatched talent to include political and social issues within the traditional frameworks of ghazals and nazms brimming with passion and rebellion.
Words that can galvanize us into action and wake us up from our complacent stupor. Words matter. Words that ought to be spoken in defence of the downtrodden. Words that heal, words that nurture, words that continue to inspire and encourage us to speak up.
Bol ke Lab Azaad Hain Tere, said Faiz.
Speak up – for your lips are free!

Viva la Love. Viva La Revolution. Viva La Faiz.

The Dig: A Review by Kanika Aurora

Not for the impatient, watch this movie for the lonely beauty of the blue skies, the nuanced, unhurried, sensitive performances, the appreciation of a collective legacy as well reaffirming your belief that Life is Continuous and “it speaks, the past.”