

# *Ingmer Bergman*

**Bibekananda Ray**

Ernst Ingmer Bergman, 89, born on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1918 in Stockholm died on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2007 in his Faro island home in Sweden in sleep, much as John Keats longed for, 'ceasing upon the midnight with no pain'. Within hours of his death, in faraway Italy, another giant of offbeat cinema, Michelangelo Antonioni also passed away, leaving a vacuum in European offbeat cinema. Bergman directed some 50 feature films in Swedish, mostly in the genre of 'chamber cinema' and was associated with a dozen more as their story, script or lyrics writer, producer and even as a giver of the ideas. After graduating from Stockholm University in literature, history and art, he wrote and produced his first play, 'The Death of Punch' in 1942, whose popularity paved his way into Swedish cinema, first as a script-writer and then as a director. He debuted with *Kris* ('The Crisis', 1945) and ended his 58-year career in cinema with a tele film, *Saraband* in 2003. After 2005, he returned to writing, staging and producing plays for the theatre, his first love.

He mairred thrice- at 25, 32 and 50, had a couple of extra-marital affairs, lived with celebrity actress, Liv Ullman for five years before his third marriage and fathered a daughter. His three most well-known films, 'Wild Strawberries' (1957), 'The Seventh Seal' (1957) and 'Fanny and Alexander' (1982) have been shown widely in India; he also scripted and directed a feature, 'A Ship Bound for India' in 1947. Satyajit Ray's *Nayak* (1966) might have been inspired by 'Wild Strawberries' in which an aged actor (played memorably by his *guru*, Victor Sjdstrom), driving to Stockholm to receive an award, breaks journey in his country home and goes down memory lane. Oscar came to three of his films 'The Virgin Spring' (1961), 'Through a glass darkly' (1961) and 'Fanny & Alexander' (1983). Many of his later films were shot in Faro Island where he began to live from 1966, initially with Liv Ullman and later with his third wife, Ingrid Von Rosen.

His other noted films are 'It rains on our love' (1946), 'Music in Darkness' and 'Port of Call' (both 1948), 'The Devil's Wanton' (1949), 'Summer Interlude' (1950), 'Secrets of Women' and 'Monika' (both in 1952), 'Smiles of a Summer Knight' (1955) whose songs he wrote too, 'The Face' (1958), 'The Devil's Eye' (1960), 'Winter Light' (1963), 'Persona' (1966), 'The Hour of the Wolf' (1968) and 'The Serpent's Egg' (1977). His two other passions were music and theatre; in the 1950s he used to work in theatre for seven months in a year. Although a maker of out-an-out offbeat films, he was a cultural icon of Sweden for a host of his cine and telefilms. His films are often morbid, weaving philosophical and psychological issues- ethics, faith and loneliness-engulfing his characters.

His ideas on film-making were as original as his films. In an essay, contributed to 'Film Makers on Film Making' (Pelican, 1967, in which Satyajit Ray wrote on *Pather Panchali*), he said, film making to him was 'a necessity of nature, a need comparable to hunger and thirst'. "Cinema would not exist but for an imperfection of the human eye, namely its inability to perceive separately a series of images which follow each other rapidly and which are essentially identical. ...I am then either a deceiver, or when the audience is aware of the fraud an illusionist." He said, his films often began 'with an image' and "these images come and attach themselves like silvery fish to my net, or more precisely, I myself am trapped in a net, the texture of which I am not aware of- fortunately".

Film making, he added, was an idiocy, a 'sublime idiocy, the transforming of dreams into shadows, the chopping up of a tragedy into five hundred small pieces, the experimentation with each of these pieces, and finally the putting back together of these pieces so that they constitute again a unity which will once more be the tragedy.

It is the idiocy of fabricating a tapeworm 8000 feet long which will nourish itself on the life and mind of the actors, producers and creators... Film making is also plunging with one's deepest roots back into the world of childhood." About the 'goal of his films', he said: "I never have to worry about the judgement of the posterity, or of my contemporaries; my first and last names are engraved nowhere and they will disappear with me. But a small part of myself will survive in the anonymous and triumphant totality. A dragon or a devil, or perhaps a saint, what does it matter?"

There are not many film-makers in the world, nor there have been, with a perception so deep and without frills about the nature of cinema of which he was a prolific maker. In the 'chamber genre' that he excelled in, he focused on the *mise-en-scene*, i.e., binding a sequence to the next organically, taking particular care of the visual rhythm and metaphors. His most expressive technique was close-up of face which along with the band, revealed the innermost aspects of human emotion. He was also fascinated with women's faces (a number of his films' titles are about women), seen most strikingly in 'Persona' and 'Cries and Whispers' (1972). He admitted in autobiographical 'Bergman on Bergman' that he was always trying to generate his mother's face.

In old age, he busied himself with making tele films for the Swedish Television until 2005, the most well-known being *Saraband*, his last contribution to cinema. His films were the staple of film societies, the world over; 'Wild Strawberries' was a rave in Calcutta Film Society, founded by Satyajit Ray and Chidananda Dasgupta among others on 15th August 1947. Two other films that were popular with film societies are 'The Seventh Seal' and 'Silence' (1963), both very morbid and dealing with alienated characters. While Antonioni came to Kolkata, ensconced in a wheel chair, to attend a film festival in early 1990s, Bergman never travelled to India. In a meeting with Amita Malik, film writer, in Stockholm in 1965, he was eager to know about Satyajit Ray. Buddhadev Dasgupta was for a while under his influence, e.g., in preferring long shots which were Bergman's favourite. Unlike Antonioni, he was very home-bound and never even attended a Cannes Festival where his films were a rave. All the same, he was a rebel in cinema. In the essay mentioned above, he wrote : "I believe in artistic rebellion. I think, new approaches, new forms are needed to reflect the changed world we live in". That should be his message to Indian film-makers too, particularly to the makers of offbeat cinema if they want to keep alive the endangered genre. □□□