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DEVI

(The Goddess) 1960

Produced by
Satyajit Ray Productions,
Calcutta

Story
Based on a story by Prabhat
Mukherjee

Script & Direction

Satyajit Ray

Photography

Subrata Mitra

Art Direction

Bansi Chandragupta

Music

Ali Akbar Khan

Editing

Dulal Dutta

Lead Players

Chhabi Biswas (*Kalikinkar*),

Soumitra Chatterjee (*Uma*

Prasad), Sharmila Tagore

(*Dayamoyee*), Karuna

Banerjee (*Hari Sundari*)

Kalikinkar Roy, a rich 'zamindar' (feudal landlord), is a deeply religious devotee of *Kali* (Goddess of Destruction). His elder son Tarapada, is a meek character, careful not to displease his father for fear of losing his claim to the property. Tarapada is married to Harisundari and they have a five-year-old son, Khoka.

Umaprasad, the younger son, is studying in a college in Calcutta. Unlike his brother, Umaprasad resents his father's conservative, religious ideology. To break away from the stifling atmosphere at home, he hopes to work and live in Calcutta with his wife Daya.

Daya, however, is a great favourite of her father-in-law. In a dream one night, Kalikinkar envisions Daya as the incarnation of the Goddess Kali. While a disbelieving Umaprasad studies in Calcutta, Kalikinkar proclaims Daya a Goddess, and she is revered as a deity in Chandipur. Her husband arrives to witness the spectacle of a sick child's miraculous recovery at Daya's feet.

A quarrel ensues between Kalikinkar and his unnerved younger son. Late at night Umaprasad and his wife are about to leave when Daya, fearful but intrigued by her seemingly wonderful powers, chooses to stay. But soon she tires of her role and pines for her husband.

During this time, Khoka falls seriously ill. Hari-sundari, the elder daughter-in-law, always contemptuous of Daya's healing powers, insists that the child be taken to a doctor. But her father-in-law and her husband will

not hear of it. Within hours the child dies in Daya's lap. Meanwhile, Umaprasad returns determined to take his wife with him this time. But Daya, rudely shocked by Khoka's death, loses sanity. She dies gladly in her husband's arms, replete with the knowledge that she is human.

IBSEN IN AN INDIAN SETTING

*Eric Rhode
Sight & Sound/1964*

At first glance you might see *Devi* as no more than a film with a thesis, Ibsen in an Indian setting.

The thesis, it seems, is clear; and in fact is nothing less than the latent theme of the *Apu* trilogy made articulate. Kalinkar is superstitious: the 'proof' of his daughter-in-law's divinity is a vision and a miracle. Such superstitions will finally destroy the old India; the 'proofs' and achievements of science will provide the only salvation. Satyajit Ray has tactfully set the action of his film 100 years ago. All the same, the reference to modern India is plain. One can understand why some Hindus were infuriated by it and why, for a time, it was not granted an export licence.

*From Ray's script, his sketch
of the deranged Daya*



Fortunately *Devi* is much more than a tract. As always, Ray shows sympathy for the old order as well as for the new: Kalinkar may be self-indulgent, yet he is also a man of his time and, in the manner Chhabi Biswas plays him, both good-natured and subtle: the pilgrims also are seen as impressive. On a closer look, indeed, *Devi* is anything but a tract. It has touches of a Greek tragedy in which *Kali*, the destroyer, exacts her necessary sacrifice; not without reason is Dayamoyee chased by furies across a sunlit field of flowers. Again, and most convincingly, you could see *Devi* as a study of the unconscious forces which hold a family together. Kalinkar believes his daughter-in-law is a goddess because he misinterprets a dream; he doesn't realise how much he is in love with her. Uma is paralysed by his wife's deification because he relies on her in every way, and without her becomes indecisive. In this context we see the child's death as a family tragedy.

Ray establishes the domestic scene swiftly and with tact, above all in the two finely edited bedroom sequences. One remembers, in particular, the moments when Dayamoyee releases her husband from a ravelled-up shirt, or massages Kalinkar's feet while he fastidiously sucks at a 'hookah'. The spacious palace is evoked by sounds: footsteps clatter across marble pavings, a parrot squawks, a silly nursemaid laughs hysterically from behind a door. The camera roves around beds shrouded in mosquito nets, in a grave twilight reminiscent of the final scenes of *L'Avventura*. Lovers require privacy, and the camera holds back; a kiss is seen from middle distance and in silhouette. Privacy and reticence: all the more poignant, then, that the sacrifice should be so public, and the catastrophe take place in streams of sunlight.

Kalinkar. (ardent devotee of Goddess Kali), with disbelieving son, Umaprasad



*Poor villager comes to
Dayamoyee as Kali for a
cure for his grandson*



Ray's observation of this household may at times appear to be mannered; the child peeping through fingers while his aunt finds him a sweet, looks tired in comparison with a similar scene in *Pather Panchali*. Still, *Devi* is about a high-born family, and the atmosphere needs to be a little precious. Like Renoir, and unlike most other directors, Ray has a real understanding of every class. He describes his aristocrats generously and without bias; yet he misses none of their foibles. I liked, especially, one vignette of two young patricians, moustachioed like Douglas Fairbanks Sr. riding home in a carriage, manicured nails, elegant gestures, yet bashful in conversation. As a structure *Devi* is deceptively lucid.

Penelope Gilliatt
New Yorker

GIRL INTO GODDESS

When Satyajit Ray made *The Goddess* (Academy Cinema Club) it was banned for export because the Indian Government thought its candour about the power of superstition in India might harm their country's name abroad. The man who lifted the ban was Nehru himself.

It isn't surprising that people tried to smother the picture because it is very open about the misery that can be caused by the pious, and there is nothing that arouses more ferocious protectiveness than piety. It also wouldn't really have been surprising if some people had been deterred from making the film at all, for the different reason that it is about a subject that might well be impossible for non-Indians to grasp.

The Goddess is worlds away from Ray's *Apu* Trilogy; it isn't about a poor man with problems fundamental to us all, it is about a rich, high-caste family caught in a situation that is absolute to Hinduism, which is one of the hardest of all religions for outsiders to follow. In a novel this would have worried no one. The novelist has a long-

established right to explore the singular. But there is a heavy subconscious obligation on filmmakers to do the opposite, to universalise and to point out the typical, and it is a wonderful triumph of art that *The Goddess* so successfully declines to do it.

The heroine, who is 17 years old, has a shyness with her husband that is without the sense of threat that generally underlies English reserve, and there is no analogy that I can think of anywhere in Western culture to her father-in-law's religious love for her, which is enough to convert his gratitude for her attention into a sudden calamitous conviction that she is an incarnation of a maternal goddess.

There are two sequences in *The Goddess* that carry identical charges of feeling, one where the girl is carrying out Hindu rituals at the family shrine and another where she is tending her father-in-law; it isn't surprising that to a deeply religious old man who has lately lost his own wife, the sacred and the domestic should therefore suddenly become confused in a vision of the girl as 'Devi' that he declares to be the clearest he has ever had.

CONVINCING STUDY OF UPPER CLASS DECADENCE

Pauline Kael
I Lost It At The Movies

It is part of our heritage from the thirties that the poor still seem 'real' and the rich 'trivial'. *Devi* should, however, please even Marxists if they would go to see it; it is the most convincing study of upper-class decadence I have ever seen. But it is Ray's feeling for the beauty within this disintegrating way of life that makes it convincing. Eisenstein cartooned the upper classes and made them hateful; they became puppets in the show he was staging. Ray, by giving them the respect and love that he gives the poor and struggling, helps us to understand their demoralisation. The rich, deluded father-in-law of *Devi* is as human in his dreamy sensuality as Apu's own poet father. Neither can sustain his way of life or his beliefs against the new pressures; and neither can adapt.

*Dayamoyee has gone mad and
rushes to her death*

