

## Document Citation

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**DEVI**  
(The Goddess)

Cast

Doyamoyee ..... SARMILA TAGORE  
Umaprasad, the younger son ..... SOUMITRA CHATTERJEE  
Kalikinkar Roy ..... CHHABI BISWAS  
Taraprasad, the older son ..... PURNENDU MUKHERJEE  
Harasundari ..... KARUNA BANERJEE  
Khoka, Taraprasad's son ..... ARPAN CHOWDHURY  
Bhudeb ..... ANIL CHATTERJEE  
Professor Sarkar. .... KALI SARKAR  
Nibaran ..... MOHAMMED ISRAIL  
Kaviraj. .... KHAGESH CHAKRAVARTI  
Priest. .... NAGENDRANATH KABYABYAKARANTIRTHA  
Sarala. .... SANTA DEVI

Credits

Written and Directed by ..... SATYAJIT RAY  
From the story "Devi" by ..... PRABHAT KUMAR MUKHERJEE  
From a theme by ..... RABINDRANATH TAGORE  
Produced by ..... SATYAJIT RAY PRODUCTIONS  
Cinematography ..... SUBRATA MITRA  
Editor ..... DULAL DUTTA  
Music ..... ALI AKBAR KHAN  
Art Director ..... BANSI CHANDRAGUPTA  
Sound ..... DURGADAS MITRA

1960      93 minutes      In Bengali with English subtitles

A Sony Pictures Classics Release

*President's Gold Medal, New Delhi, 1961*

## DEVI (Synopsis)

Kalikinkar Roy (Chhabi Biswas), a rich widowed Zamindar (feudal landlord), is a deeply religious devotee of Kali (Goddess of Destruction). His eldest son, Taraprasad (Purnendu Mukherjee), is a weak character who always tries to please his father. Taraprasad is married to Harasundari (Karuna Banerjee) and they have a five-year-old son, Khoka (Arpan Chowdhury). --

Umaprasad (Soumitra Chatterjee), the younger son, is away from home studying English and literature at 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 Doyamoyee (Sarmila Tagore), known as Doya.

Doyamoyee, however, is a great favorite of her father-in-law. In a dream Kalikinkar envisions Doya as the incarnation of the Goddess Kali. While a disbelieving Umaprasad studies in Calcutta, Kalikinkar proclaims Doya a Goddess, and she is revered as a deity in Chandipur. Harasundari, skeptical of Doya's deity and upset at her husband's too-quick acceptance of it, drafts a letter to Umaprasad in Calcutta. He arrives, deeply angered by his father's fanaticism and prepared for a confrontation between their two philosophies.

Convinced that his father is mad, Umaprasad witnesses the spectacle of a sick child's miraculous recovery at Doya's feet. As word of Doya's "power" spreads, devotees gather from all over the area. Still unconvinced, Umaprasad plans to take Doya and leave the village during the night. But as they begin to leave, Doya, still fearful but now strangely intrigued by her seemingly wonderful powers, chooses to stay behind.

During this time, Khoka falls seriously ill and Harasundari, always contemptuous of Doya's goddess personification, insists that the child be taken to a doctor. But her father-in-law and husband, blinded by their faith, will not hear of it. Taken to Doya for "miraculous" healing, the child dies in her lap within hours.

Determined to take Doya back to Calcutta with him, Umaprasad finds her, shocked by Khoka's death, losing sanity--only to die in his arms.

\* \* \*

## DEVI

"Despite being set in the 1860's, "Devi," which Ray made in 1959/1960, is a film with strong resonances in today's India, and even further afield, wherever religious fanaticism exists. It is Ray's most 'Hindu' film, and one whose impact depends greatly on atmosphere and suggestive details--which can make it difficult of access to those unfamiliar with Hindu rituals and practices. Its pivot is a religious belief with ancient roots; the notion that a woman can become an incarnation of a goddess.

...Satyajit Ray wrote in 1982:

*The western critic who hopes to do full justice to "Devi" must be prepared to do a great deal of homework before he confronts the film. He must read up on the cult of the Mother Goddess; on the 19th century Renaissance in Bengal and how it affected the values of orthodox Hindu society; on the position of the Hindu bride in an upper-class family. All the turns and twists of the plot grow out of one or more of these factors. The western critic who hasn't done his homework will pin his faith on the rational son to save him from the swirls and eddies of an alien value system; but even here the son's ultimate helplessness will convince him only if he is aware of the stranglehold of Hindu orthodoxy in 19th century Bengal.*

There are perhaps two outstanding misconceptions among non-Indians that seriously hinder appreciation of the film. The first is the idea that God is male, which is integral to western religious thinking. In India the female nature of God is celebrated too. Tagore, who gifted the theme of "Devi" to the writer Prabha Kumar Mukherjee (who published it as a brief short story in 1899), expresses this beautifully in Creative Unity:

*What I have felt in the women of India is the consciousness of an ideal--their simple faith in the sanctity of devotion lighted by love which is held to be divine. True womanliness is regarded in our country as the saintliness of love. It is not merely praised there, but literally worshipped; and she who is gifted with it is called Devi, as one revealing in herself Woman, the Divine. That this has not been a mere metaphor to us is because, in India, our mind is familiar with the idea of God in an eternal feminine aspect.*

The second misconception is that the Mother is a force for creation but not for destruction too. In the case of Kali this is implied by her appearance. She wears a girdle of severed arms and a necklace of skulls. Her tongue is sticking out--some say in a coy gesture familiar in Bengali girls, others so that she can lick up blood. She has four arms. In her two left hands she holds a decapitated head and bloody sword, while her two right hands confer blessings on her devotees and make a gesture similar to that seen in statues of the Buddha, signifying 'be without fear'.

...Upon its release in India. "Devi" ran into a lot of trouble ... Ray's film was widely seen as an attack on Hinduism, and there was a determined attempt to prevent its screening abroad, though it was eventually given the President's Gold Medal by the Government. Ray found himself in the same position as Tagore half a century before, defending his work as an attack on extreme orthodox but not on Hinduism itself. But, as with Tagore, his critics could see that the two were not easily to be separated. As Ray puts it today, with a smile, 'Well you see that was one way of defending myself. It's a fine distinction, a thin line.' While he finds organized religion antipathetic, his own beliefs remain fundamentally private and unarticulated. He keeps an open mind about reincarnation--witness his later film "The Golden Fortress"--but about "Devi" he says, 'at no point am I convinced that Doyamoyee is an incarnation. There's no question of that.'"

--Andrew Robinson, Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye