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Woman into an Idol: An Exploration of the Burden of Divinity in Satyajit Ray's *Devi*

Abstract: *The crux of mythology is tightly woven within the boundaries of belief, and it thrives consistently through the sections of storytelling. The belief may lead its way independently, but when followed blindly, it gives birth to a version that becomes marginalised towards superstition. Oftentimes, this superstition leads to a definite alteration of an individual, leading them to sidestep the barricade of reality. The far-fetched conceits may draw their lines, but they blend effortlessly with the fixtures. Thereby, this gives rise to the horrific bandwidth that outlines the banners surrounding the mindful capacity of reality at large. Not only is Satyajit Ray one of the faces who defines Bengali cinema, but he is also one of the visionaries who has stood by Indian cinema, bringing it right to the spotlight. The appropriate synonym that can be ascribed to Devi is Goddess. In the film Devi (1960), Ray portrays this silhouette of a person who is transformed into a Goddess. He also deals with the objectification of belief and the transition that can transpire in any individual. The delegates may be studied in their entirety, but what it brings out is that this belief modifies the course of the definition of real, and what it symbolises to the world. This paper will look into the imprint that belief has the conditioning to bring on any individual, and it will also study the characteristics that elaborate on its significance thoroughly.*

Keywords: Myth, Satyajit Ray, Regional Films, Bengali Films, Indian Films.

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Introduction

Within mythology, there lies a vision that tries to proclaim itself through the barriers that guard reality. The trials and tribulations may attempt to attribute some of its traits to the said path, and what remains is that superstition never ceases to leave its mark on. However, the awkwardness creeps in after a significant period, and the educated minds are somewhat advised not to let their beliefs surpass their wisdom considerably. They thoughtfully strive not to let their intellectual thoughts get abandoned in the process, because their education has been instrumental in engulfing their minds and in validating the reasons. Satyajit Ray is one of the renowned faces whose works have enriched world cinema. In *Devi* (1960), he has accurately depicted the politics that go into the genre of mythmaking. The patriarchal voice subtly strands its residue in determining the set-up adequately. The mansplaining doesn't halt even for a second, and it imbibes in the corners of the psyche of the victim. Even the recovery is not explicit because the intentions are not distinct in their overall appearance. What is recognisable in this pattern is that there is no tangible warrior who survives the course in this battle. Even the patriarchal voice gets its due, and the familial relationships get scattered as a result. At the end, the attempted saviour gets enough opportunities to sit back and introspect on whether the operation could have been more definitive while there was still time. However, the politics doesn't wind up in this specificity. It may subdue, but it doesn't get suspended entirely. The voice suffers, not the premise of patriarchy, which determines its pitch. The politics of mythmaking survives the route vivaciously, because trivial incidents like this cannot conclude its existence. The patriarchal beliefs thrive perfectly, so do these places that leverage the benefits derived. Neither is there any clearer voice whose tone surpasses it, nor is there any reason present while building it. The justification of the educated minds isn't adept at enduring the very complexities that lie at the nucleus of this battle. The weapons are thrown away easily, and it is left unattended because they were lost the day they were announced to the world of counterparts. The consequences are faced by the people who surround the instrument and its player. Therefore, the intricate notion of belief is equipped thoroughly, triumphant in its design. Ray meticulously illustrates this portrait in *Devi*.

The key objectives of this research paper are:

1. To examine the representation of *Devi* in this film.
2. To understand the dialectics which assist it.

3. To analyse the impact this film has in delving into mythmaking.

Literature Review

Satyajit Ray has dealt with a plethora of themes in a varied range of contexts. When discussing myths, Bengali films have probed into some consequential lengths as well. The new-age Bengali films have portrayed specific myths, defined their contextual substance, and ensured that it aligns with the characterisation as depicted in these films.

Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish (2012) is a Bengali film directed by Rituparno Ghosh. It portrays the myth of Chitrangada as a warrior princess who wishes for a feminine transformation after meeting Arjun. The significance of Chitrangada runs parallel to that of the protagonist of the film, named Rudra. He wishes for a sex change after meeting his lover. The film poses a question to the viewers: if a metamorphosis is required when an individual is actually comfortable in their skin?

Take One (2014) is a Bengali film directed by Mainak Bhaumik. It renders the life of an actress who plays the character of Maa Sita, and is harshly critiqued by society for her choices. Even her personal life goes for a toss, and society forces her to surrender for her actions. She rebels up to a certain extent, and withdraws after a while. The film questions if modern Indian woman is a term, or if there is any deference that permits a woman to thrive on her own?

Methodology

The research methodology that will be used in this paper is Narrative analysis. Narrative analysis reviews how stories are integrated and presented before the audience. The plot, characterisation, and setting of the film are thoroughly studied to grasp the components of the complex narrative that lie beneath.

Theoretical Framework

I am not a goddess... I'm just a woman- Doyamoyee's silence.

The patriarchal structure is uncovered, where female repression is decorated with a cloak of reverence for the audience to have a close look at. The dehumanisation of women is presented where purity is fetishised by the onlookers. A woman is elevated to the position of a goddess, and thereby she ends up losing her sense of individuality in the ongoing process. There is a temporal conflict between modernity and the belief systems, but it is not efficient in providing timely intervention. The preservation of power and class is showcased with vigour, and the deconstruction exposes the conflicted structure of mythic identities.

Faith, Fear, and the Consequences It Bears

Doyamoyee has her entire existence questioned when her father-in-law, Kalikinkar, dreams about her as a reincarnation of the Goddess. Kalikinkar is a zamindar who lives in the memory of his good days. Being an ardent devotee of the Goddess Kali, Kalinkinkar arranges for extensive rituals for his daughter-in-law. Everybody accepts Kalikinkar's belief because of his position as a reputed zamindar in the village. Doyamoyee's husband, Umaprasad, rushes to the village after receiving the news and proceeds to question his father about his age-old beliefs. In the meanwhile, the charnamrito (offering of the goddess) of Doyamoyee touches a sick boy's lips, and he is healed from his illness. This incident baffles Umaprasad up to a certain extent, while his father continues to praise the integrity of the Goddess. Amidst all the chaos, Umaprasad convinces Doyamoyee to come with him to Calcutta, and she complies. However, Doyamoyee begins to interrogate herself in this way and raises the confusion, 'What if I am really a goddess?' (1:05:26). Umaprasad decides to take her back to his father's household, and he returns to Kolkata. Umaprasad's nephew Khoka becomes bedridden with an illness, and his mother Harasundari notifies the doctor to treat him secretly. But the doctor hesitates to put his medications because Kalikinkar wouldn't like his interference at all. Khoka's father informs Kalikinkar, and he takes Khoka to Doyamoyee. Doyamoyee takes Khoka in her lap, and the child dies in the morning. Taraprasad returns to his home and begins accusing his father, Kalikinkar, of his beliefs. He finally resolves to save his wife from the clutches of tyranny. The scene shifts to Doyamoyee dressed as a bride, while Umaprasad watches her actions helplessly. She pleads with him to let her live, while she disappears in the mist, and Umaprasad rushes to catch her.

The Deification and Oppression of Women

The film introduces Doyamoyee as a naïve seventeen-year-old who lives with her in-laws in their zamindari establishment in the village. While her husband Umaprasad is away for his education at Kolkata, Doyamoyee looks after her father-in-law and finds a companion in her nephew. Kalikinkar calls Doyamoyee Maa (an endearing term for mother) and adores her companionship as his daughter. A dream alters this equation, where Kalikinkar sees the divine supreme aligning with Doyamoyee. The third eye, which belongs to the forehead of the Goddess, emerges and gets attached to the forehead of Doyamoyee. This is believed to be a revelation for Kalikinkar, and he convinces the entire household to follow his instructions. Doyamoyee's nails dig into the crevices of the wall when her father-in-law drastically falls at her feet to worship her. His aristocratic zamindari identity does remain unharmed, for his elder son Taraprasad and the rest of the servants readily follow in his suit. He arranges for a separate room for Doyamoyee, because she is a Goddess and must be kept with care and precision. Hereby, Doyamoyee becomes detached from the rest of the household, particularly her Khoka, who gets scared of her Kakima's status as a Goddess. Harasundari grows skeptical of the events around her.

She repeatedly examines the atmosphere that looms in the corners of the household, including the elaborate pujas that are conducted for worshipping Devi. However, all of her doubts go unanswered because her husband Taraprasad doesn't care to listen to them. Taraprasad's zamindari needs are fulfilled through the aristocratic legacy of Kalikinkar, and this is why he never dares to cross-question his father's beliefs. He remains subdued and listens to whatever his father instructs him to do, be it falling near the feet of her younger sister-in-law Doyamoyee to acquire her blessings, or taking his sick child Khoka to Doyamoyee instead of a proper medical treatment. Harasundari can't assert her judgment in the household. She appears to be the only one who doesn't care to appease her father-in-law. However, her opinion doesn't hold any significance in the household because of her position as a woman and a daughter-in-law. She is expected to follow whatever the men of the household decide for themselves. When Doyamoyee faints while seated on the pedestal amidst all the chaos, crowd, and elaborate rituals, Harasundari visualises the spectacle shockingly. However, her agency as a woman doesn't permit her to rebel. She writes to her brother-in-law in the hope that, as the husband of Doyamoyee, his opinion will be listened to by his father, Kalikinkar. When her son Khoka begins suffering from an unknown illness, Harasundari hides it from the rest of the household. She calls the doctors asking them to treat him secretly. Her intuition warns her that if Kalikinkar comes to know about the illness, her son Khoka would probably be left unmedicated. But her husband's interference develops this nightmare into a reality. Harasundari has no alternative other than to plead in front of Doyamoyee repeatedly, asking if she will be able to heal her son properly.

Fatalism and Illusion of Divinity

The incorruptibility of the Doyamoyee is portrayed when she is shown next to her husband at the beginning of the film. Durga Puja is over, and Umapasrad has to return to his university. He teases his wife about his leave, and her eyes bubble with the hope for a future where her husband will be by her side. Doyamoyee's husband, Umapasrad, considers himself a progressive Indian man who can speak English well and has been in Calcutta for most of his education. He is appreciative of his scholarly self and proceeds to shun most of the superstitions happening around him. He encourages his friend's love affair with a widow and assures him that he can even make his friend's father accept the same. But his voice numbs in front of his father when the poor child gets healed after drinking the charnamrito. He tries to interfere and take his wife with him to Calcutta. But he withdraws when his wife enquires, 'What if something evil happens to you if I run away?' (1:06:16). His fearless self hesitates when his wife emphasises this fear, and his determination to rescue her takes a backseat here. However, his educated self doesn't silence itself. He gets the reassurance that was needed from his professor, who instructs him to return and take a stand for his wife. The intrusion of Umapasrad occurs in the final stages, but Doyamoyee has descended into madness by then. She pleads with Umapasrad to let her live, but she

disappears by the end of the film. The seventeen-year-old self of Doyamoyee didn't have the dexterity to raise her assessment against the ongoing spectacle. A good daughter-in-law is expected to respect her father-in-law's wishes. Doyamoyee does the same. Even if she didn't, it is highly debatable if a seventeen-year-old girl's wish would be listened to in the zamindari premises. She doesn't dare to be rebellious, quietly listens to her father-in-law, and partakes in the elaborate rituals while seated on the pedestal of the Goddess. Crowds gather to take her blessings and the prasad. Her heart desires to be with Khoka and her husband in her room. But all of these have been snatched from her with caution. The procedure of purification does its sorcery and exterminates her existence as an ordinary human. She becomes perplexed by her status as a Goddess. When the sick Khoka is brought to her, she becomes distracted. Her charnamrito had the healing powers for the poor boy earlier. It may do the same for Khoka as well. When the inevitable happens, Doyamoyee loses the capacity to grasp reality. Is she a Goddess or a Human? She loses herself in the mist that ends up swallowing her being.

The Emblem behind Belief and Entrapment

The entire procedure of the construction of an idol from an ordinary woman has been highlighted in the film efficiently. Doyamoyee's father-in-law was a reputed zamindar in the village. His status as a powerful man contributes to the politics of myth-making. He has the resources that are needed to promote elaborate formalities for the Goddess. When Doyamoyee faints on the pedestal amidst the smoke and chaos, Kalikinkar announces that Devi Doyamoyee has gone for samadhi (emerged into her transcendental self). The rest readily agree to his words and begin praising the Goddess. Kalikinkar's younger son pursues his education in Kolkata, and his elder son's family obeys whatever he decides for the family. Both the daughters-in-law have no choice but to accept their role as the subdued selves of the household. The rest of the people in the village deliberately follow Kalikinkar's vision, and it is promoted more so when the poor boy is healed by the charnamrito. The question of authenticity is raised when his educated son Umaprasad arrives. Only his judgment is taken into consideration as he is Doyamoyee's guardian. However, his opinion is fought against, and Umaprasad accepts his defeat in the first phase. He leaves, but his education forces him to return and save his wife's life. Umaprasad accuses his father of his nephew's death, 'You have killed Khoka, Father... Your superstition is the reason that is responsible for his death... You have endowed divinity on my wife, and that has made her life a living hell... I don't know what benefit you have derived from it, but it has completely destroyed her life. I will save her life today.' (1:34:43-1:35:18). But Khoka's untimely death worsens Doyamoyee's state of being entirely, and it has made sure that she descends into total lunacy. The entire structure of fanaticism is brought out in this film. The battle between superstition and education is portrayed adeptly in the climax of the film. A question looms: hasn't this final confrontation happened a tad bit too late?

Satyajit Ray has intricately woven *Devi* with precision. The conclusion of the film is for the audience to decipher. There is no long discussion on religious fanaticism onscreen, but rather the events are depicted for the audience to comprehend the viciousness of it. The divine is to be prayed to, and no ordinary human has the competency to take that enormous responsibility on themselves. If endowed forcibly, that does lead to disastrous consequences.

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