

FESTIVITIES ON-SCREEN

The many faces of
DURGA
PUJA
in cinema

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In early Bengali cinema, Durga Puja was often depicted as the very soul of communal life. Bimal Roy's *Devdas* (1955), though remembered largely for its tragic romance, captures a moment of festivity in the Durga Puja celebrations at Paro's house. Here, the grandeur of the goddess becomes a counterpoint to Devdas' inner decay, the vibrancy of the rituals contrasting with his growing despair. Ritwik Ghatak went further, using Durga Puja imagery as a metaphor for dislocation and longing. In *Meghe Dhaaka Tara* (1960), the sound of *dhaak* blends with the cries of the protagonist Neeta, fusing festivity with tragedy. For Ghatak, the goddess was never merely an idol but a symbol of resilience and sacrifice, much like

his female characters who carry the weight of families fractured by the partition.

What remains fascinating is how the aesthetics of Durga Puja on screen often mirror the aesthetics of cinema itself. Both are public spectacles designed to overwhelm the senses, to invite immersion and disbelief. A pandal is not unlike a film set, meticulously crafted, temporary, and destined to dissolve after a few days. The immersion of the idol into the river is akin to the rolling of end credits, the dissolution of the constructed world. Filmmakers have long been drawn to this parallel. Satyajit Ray, in his documentary *The Inner Eye on Benode Behari Mukherjee*, filmed Puja immersions almost like abstract art, focusing on textures and sounds rather than



Durga Puja has always carried a cinematic quality of its own. The visual opulence of clay idols, the soundscape of *dhaak* reverberating through the night, and the collective ecstasy of a city lit with pandals form a backdrop that filmmakers across decades have found irresistible. When transposed on screen, the festival is never merely a seasonal marker but an emotional, cultural, and often political punctuation. It tells us as much about the characters as it does about the society in which they exist. Over the years, its representations have shifted from reverent spectacle to metaphorical commentary, mirroring cinema's own changing relationship with myth, ritual, and modernity.

narrative. Years later, Goutam Ghose in *Antarjali Jatra* (1987) would frame the festival as a haunting juxtaposition to widowhood rituals, highlighting the hypocrisy of a society that celebrates female divinity while marginalising real women. Aparna Sen's *36Chowringhee Lane* (1981) uses fleeting glimpses of the festival to highlight the alienation of an Anglo-Indian woman who finds herself outside the very city she inhabits. The pandal lights and processions signify inclusion, and her exclusion sharpens the loneliness at the heart of the narrative.

In contemporary cinema, Durga Puja often becomes a tool to navigate identity and urban life. In Rituparno Ghosh's *Utsab* (2000), the Durga Puja celebrations in an ancestral home serve as a canvas for generational conflict, financial anxieties, and the collapse of traditional family structures. The goddess presides silently over human squabbles, as if reminding viewers that even divinity is subject to the vagaries of inheritance disputes and property sales. Pradeep Sarkar's *Parineeta* (2005) stages the climactic confrontation amid Puja festivities, where the goddess' immersion parallels the heroine's reclamation of agency. The use of *dhaak* beats intensifies the urgency, transforming a personal drama into mythic catharsis. In *Detective Byomkesh Bakshi*! (2015), the Puja serves as a time marker in wartime Kolkata, with the goddess' presence heightening the city's chaos and uncertainty.

In Bollywood's early decades, religious rituals were usually shown in broad strokes, meant to unify

audiences rather than dwell on regional specificity. Durga Puja would appear occasionally, but often as shorthand for the triumph of good over evil. Raj Kapoor's *Jagte Raho* (1956) ends with the protagonist finding water at a temple during a Durga Puja-like ritual, a symbolic rebirth after a night of dehumanisation. Yet it was only in the 1990s and 2000s, as mainstream Hindi cinema turned more toward

rooted settings, that Durga Puja acquired a more detailed presence. Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Devdas* (2002) perhaps remains the most opulent representation of the festival in Hindi films. The now-iconic *Dola Re Dola* sequence stages Durga Puja as a site where two women, Paro and Chandramukhi, reclaim narrative space from the doomed Devdas. The visuals of sindoors, the sweeping sets of the pandal, and the thundering background score elevate the moment into operatic cinema, but beneath the spectacle lies Bhansali's attempt to feminise the gaze on Puja itself.

Years later, Sujoy Ghosh's *Kahaani* (2012) would offer a starkly

different interpretation. The climax unfolds against the immersion of the goddess, with Vidya Balan's character using the frenzy of the crowd to exact revenge. The metaphor of Durga slaying Mahishasura finds resonance in a modern-day woman confronting patriarchy, betrayal, and terrorism. Here, Durga Puja is not an ornamental backdrop but the very grammar of the narrative, blurring the line between ritual myth and cinematic action. Durga Puja has also travelled beyond Bengal in interesting ways. Where *Devdas* revels in excess, *Kahaani* thrives on contrast. And then comes *Lootera* (2013), where Vikramaditya Motwane gives Puja a melancholic intimacy. Sonakshi Sinha's *Pakhi* stands by her father as drums echo in the background, the camera catching the fragile beauty of light against smoke. The Puja pandal is not grand but personal, a reminder of both heritage and impermanence. The film's tragic love story finds a mirror in the fleeting joy of Puja, which vanishes almost as soon as it arrives.

The cinematic Durga Puja also reflects how films negotiate the

tension between tradition and commerce. Just as pandals are increasingly funded by corporate sponsors, cinema too has absorbed Puja as a spectacle that can sell tickets. Yet within this commodification lies resilience. For every over-the-top depiction in a mainstream blockbuster, there exists an intimate portrayal like that in Kaushik Ganguly's *Bishorjan* (2017), where the cross-border immersion of Durga idols on the India-Bangladesh frontier becomes a metaphor for shared culture transcending political boundaries. In a similar vein, Srijit Mukherji's *Uma* (2018) constructs an entire Durga Puja in summer for a dying child, underlining how cinema and Puja alike thrive on the collective act of make-believe. *Asur* (2020), starring Jeet and Abir Chatterjee, directly places Durga Puja at the heart of its narrative. The making of the idol itself becomes central to the story of rivalry and artistic obsession, with the goddess embodying not just devotion but ego, ambition, and downfall. The festival is not a backdrop but the very pulse of the narrative, where each stroke of clay echoes the shaping of human destiny. The allure lies in its contradictions. Durga Puja is both deeply communal and deeply personal. It is about abundance but also about the fleeting nature of life. It celebrates the triumph of good over evil, but it also mourns the departure of the goddess. Cinema thrives on such contradictions, and Puja gives filmmakers a ready-made palette of colour, music, movement, and meaning.



‘One Battle After Another’ hits \$48.5m debut, ‘Demon Slayer’ crosses \$600m worldwide

Paul Thomas Anderson's *One Battle After Another*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, scored a record \$48.5 million global opening, the strongest debut of his career. The Warner Bros release earned \$26.1m across 74 markets, outperforming *Argo*, *Sinners*, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, and *The Departed*. The UK and France led with \$3.4m each, while Germany, Italy, and Saudi Arabia also posted strong

figures. Upcoming releases in South Korea, Japan, Turkey, and China are expected to boost earnings further. Meanwhile, anime blockbuster *Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle* surpassed \$600m globally, ranking as the 8th highest-grossing film of the year. Mexico and India set all-time anime records, with Sony reporting a worldwide total of \$605.4m, including \$305.4m from Crunchyroll territories.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

‘Once Upon a Friday’

Uncertainty Principle presents a spellbinding musical journey into a world of imagination, where fairy lights shimmer, fireflies dance, and music evokes tales of unicorns, kings, and queens. Through evocative storytelling and lyrical compositions, the performance offers audiences an evening of wonder, reflection, and enchantment, appealing to dreamers of all ages.

DATE: FRIDAY | OCTOBER 3, 2025

TIME: 6:30 PM ONWARDS

VENUE: JATRA BIROTI

Duronto TV brings children-first specials for Durga Puja

As Durga Puja draws near, Duronto TV, the country's only dedicated children's channel, has unveiled a festive line-up designed to delight its young viewers while honouring cultural traditions.

At the heart of the schedule is the drama *Hoi Hoi Holla*, directed by Partha Pratim Haldar. The story follows Dr Saldar Chowdhury and the children of his apartment block as they organise a Puja and attempt to stage a play, setting off a string of comic mishaps. It will air on Ashtami, Nabami and Dashami at 11:30am and 8:00pm.

Food lovers can tune into *Banai Mojar Khabar Ma-Baba Ar Ami*,



where children cook Puja favourites such as *luchi*, *labra*, *payesh* and *fish paturi* with their parents. Broadcasts are scheduled for 1 pm and 9 pm

across the three main days.

Duronto will also air *Sharadiyo Adda*, a storytelling session that captures the spirit of Puja through intergenerational conversation. Featuring child performers Purna Anandita, Ukti Adhikari and Sworgo, the episode stars Sharmila Bandyopadhyay as the beloved grandmother figure recounting festive memories and myths. It airs on Ashtami at 10 am.



Avash releases ‘Shotta’ at private launch event

Popular Bangladeshi band Avash has released their latest original track, *Shotta*. The lyrics were written by Tanzir Tuhin, with the composition done by Tuhin and Raju Sheikh.

According to a press release issued on Sunday, the song was launched through an online platform on Saturday evening at a special event.

Prior to *Shotta*, Avash had released five original tracks, including *Manush-I*, *Avash*, *Bastob*, *Anath*, and *Camera*. This makes *Shotta* the sixth addition to their repertoire of original songs.

Muttakim Al Mahin has directed the music video for the song.

The launch event was attended by noted musicians, including Shiblu Kumar Shil from the band *Meghdol*, Rasheed Sharif Shoaib, and singer Joy Shahriar, among others.

The current members of Avash are: Tanzir Tuhin (vocals), Raju Sheikh (bass), Himel Saria (guitar), Arafat Shawon (keyboard), and Rashed Jony (drums).