

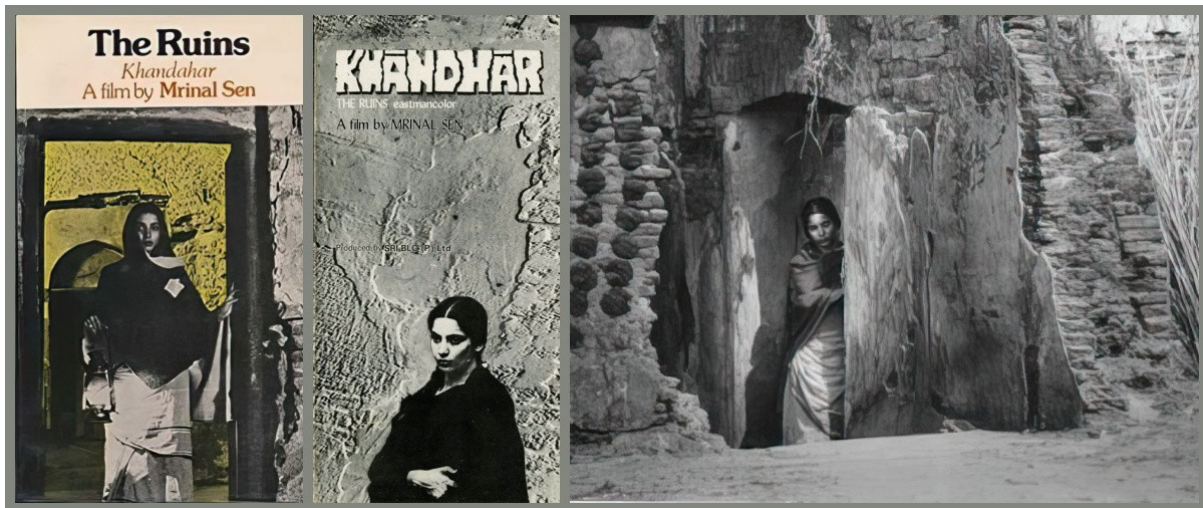
Anwasha Maity, PhD.

## **KHANDHAR (THE RUINS) (1984)**

Mrinal Sen

Hindi language

Film link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmKrDH\\_R2as](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmKrDH_R2as)



## **OVERVIEW**

### **Director**

Mrinal Sen made his first feature film in 1953 but was slow to come into success as his first few films didn't fare well at the box office. Eventually, he tasted both success and controversy with *Baishey Sraavan* (*Wedding Day*, 1960) and *Aakash Kusum* (*Up in the Clouds*, 1965). Soon after, *Mr. Bhuvan Shome* (1969), a landmark film, radically altered new cinema and art-house cinema in India. Other films such as *Mrigayaa* (*The Royal Hunt*, 1976) and *Aakaler Sandhane* (*In Search of Famine*, 1980) still retain their impact. Sen won awards at all the major international film festivals, including Cannes, Venice and Berlin. His films usually have a signature shock treatment style that is both cerebral and hard-hitting, coupled with technical jugglery and gimmicks. He was both loved and hated for his uncompromising political stance and critique of the contemporary communist government in West Bengal. Along with Satyajit Ray and Ritwick Ghatak, Sen is considered one of the trio of great Indian filmmakers both domestically and internationally.

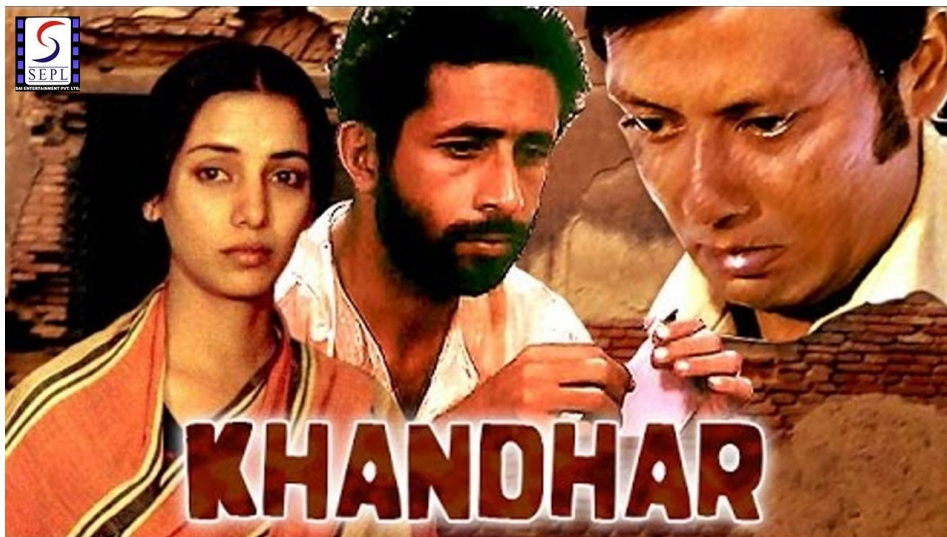
### **Film**

After *Kharij*, Sen received an offer to make his next film from Shree Bharat Lakshmi Pictures, an old and established production company in Kolkata. The film, *Khandhar*, is a direct adaptation of a critically acclaimed short story "*Telenapota Abishkar*" ("*The Discovery of Telenapota*", 1930's) by beloved Bengali author Premendra Mitra. The story had, in the 1960's, already seen a popular film adaptation with one of Sen's favourite heroines, Madhabi Mukherjee (from *Wedding Day*, 1960), playing the role of Jamini. "*The Discovery of Telenapota*", in fact, remains a rare instance in world literature of a second-person

protagonist, “you” (formal second person pronoun, “*apni*”) playing the lead role. While this was not possible to translate to the filmic medium, Sen remained true to the plot and made only a few significant changes: Subhash is a photographer, not an angler; Subhash only says “Yes” to Maa while the “you” in the short story make lengthier promises; and the ending is changed where “you” forget all about Telenapota and begin to think it was a dream after a bout of malaria.

### **Background**

Sen’s choice of Shabana Azmi for Jamini caused quite a stir, as his *Aakaler Sandhane* actress, Smita Patil, coveted the role and wanted another chance to work with Sen, which she would sadly never get, as she died of sepsis during childbirth two years later. Azmi, however, did an excellent job and won the National Film Award for Best Actress for the role in 1984. *Khandhar* also bagged two other national awards, one for Sen as Best Director and another for Best Editing (Mrinmoy Chakraborty). It was also screened in the *Un Certain Regard* section at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival. In 1985, it won two more awards: Filmfare Best Screenplay Award (Sen) and Grand Prize (Best Film) at the Chicago International Film Festival.

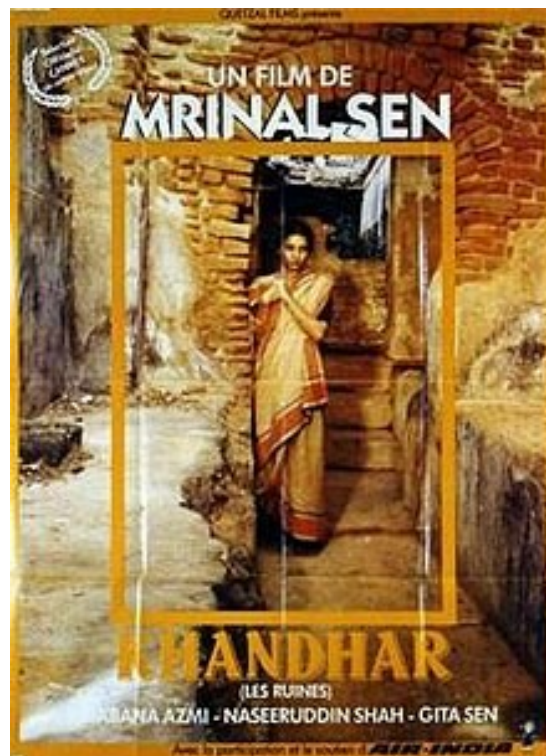


### **LIST OF CHARACTERS**

Subhash	A young photographer (played by Naseeruddin Shah)
Dipu	Subhash’s friend (played by Pankaj Kapur)
Anil	Subhash and Dipu’s friend (played by Annu Kapoor)
Jamini	Dipu’s young cousin sister (played by Shabana Azmi)
Maa	Jamini’s paralysed and blind mother (played by Gita Sen)
Harihar	Mansion caretaker (played by Rajen Tarafder)
Gauri	Harihar’s daughter (played by Sreela Majumdar)

## SYNOPSIS

To take a break from the ennui of city life, Dipu invites his friends Subhash and Anil to accompany him to Dipu's ancestral village for a long weekend. They board a crowded afternoon bus out of town and ride the final miles in a bullock cart, reaching their destination late at night: a massive, dilapidated and mostly abandoned ancestral mansion. Subhash, neither a drunkard like Dipu nor a sleepyhead like Anil, explores the surroundings from the terrace with a flashlight. He suddenly sees a young woman at one of the windows and grows curious. She is Jamini, Dipu's cousin. We see some snippets of her daily routine with her blind and paralysed mother. The next morning, the friends gather and cook a huge feast with Harihar and Gauri's help. Jamini pays Dipu and Anil a visit. Anil gets very excited to see a young, pretty woman in these desolate ruins and calls her a "graveyard rose". Maa has heard that Dipu is visiting and asks Jamini to inquire about Niranjana, one of their relatives who had visited four years ago and promised to marry Jamini. Dipu, prompted by Jamini, goes to pay his aunt a visit with Subhash in tow. Maa immediately latches on to Subhash, mistaking him for Niranjana. She begs and pleads that he marry Jamini and take her away. Subhash, caught unawares and with no support from Dipu or Jamini, agrees to Maa's request. Afterwards, Dipu chastises Subhash for making false promises and denies any responsibility towards Jamini's marriage. He is content to let the old woman wait another four years for another "Niranjana" to appear, as that relative had long married someone else. Later, Jamini speaks to Subhash and tells him that she understands why he lied. The next day, it's time for the friends to leave. Subhash suddenly runs inside, keeping everyone waiting, to take a few last photographs of Jamini. They leave. Jamini is angered and frustrated by Maa's constant needling about Niranjana and tells her the truth. They are both heartbroken. Back in his city studio, Subhash immerses himself in his photography, seemingly having forgotten all about Jamini.



## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Subhash** Subhash is the first character seen in the film and plays the second-person protagonist from the original short story, though the plot doesn't focus on him centrally or exclusively. Naseeruddin Shah, one of the best-known actors of Hindi mainstream and arthouse cinema, brings his usual effortless, "lady-killer" panache to playing a professional photographer. Subhash enjoys his friends' company, yet remains detached from everything that goes on around him.

**Humorous** Subhash, like his friends, has a knack for finding humour even in the most morbid or uncomfortable of situations. Beginning with his comic rendition of "how much further do we go, Devdas..." (a famous line from the blockbuster Hindi film *Devdas*) on the bullock cart, to joking about an owl's nest in the rafters and how the ceiling could collapse on them any moment, to being simultaneously amazed and amused by the ruins ("Time! Time! The Great Destroyer!") to quipping disrespectfully about ancestors and reincarnation, Subhash has it down pat. That said, the comedy is understated and not the kind that will have the audience in splits.

**Observer** Though comfortable in his friends' company, Subhash gives off an unmissable aura of being a misfit wherever he goes. This is perhaps a reason why he chose to be behind the camera, photographing and observing his subjects from afar and rarely opening himself up to direct and meaningful interactions with those he meets. The overall impression we get, in conjunction with the many scenes of his photography and snippets of memories of him observing others in action, is that most life events roll off him like water off a duck's back. We are not told anything about his personal history or circumstances that would have engendered such a way of life and can only guess if it's more personal preference or general middle-class characteristic.

**Kind** Thus it is a little surprising that he volunteers to accompany Dipu to meet Maa; perhaps he was truly intrigued by Jamini and wanted to peek into her life. In any case, this lands him in hot water when Maa mistakes him for Niranjan and pitifully begs him to marry Jamini, holding onto his hand and crying that it was the sole reason she was still alive. Placed in this awkward situation and getting no help from Dipu or Jamini, he acts in a most gentlemanly, non-confrontational manner, true to his character. He tells her "Yes", while fully knowing that it was not a promise he could or would fulfil— a white lie borne out of kindness and pity, and perhaps also a touch of middle-class vanity and callousness.



**Jamini** Jamini is a young, beautiful woman who lives with her paralysed mother in the ruins that Subhash and his friends visit. She is Dipu's distant cousin and admires her older brother. The harsh realities of her life have certainly made her practical and mature beyond her years, but haven't made her a cynic or incapable of joy and empathy. Shabana Azmi, one of the most brilliant actresses of Hindi cinema, brings Jamini to life; she even refused to wear any ornaments or much makeup as she felt that it would be inauthentic to a character who lives in the ruins with a blind person.

**Caring** Jamini is a full-time caregiver to the blind and paralysed Maa, who is always in bed and requires substantial support for her daily needs. Jamini's days begin and end with her caretaking duties, like feeding and bathing Maa, brushing and tying her hair, turning her on to her side in bed, fetching small items for her to hold, reading books to her and so on. She also, needless to say, takes care of all the household chores like cooking meals, cleaning, laundry, fetching water from the well and so on. They seem to barely manage to get by on her sister's handouts and cannot afford hired help.

**Enduring** Being a full-time caregiver is by no means easy for Jamini, especially as Maa is always complaining and scolding her for something or the other. Jamini is always soft-spoken and rarely raises her voice. We see her annoyance break free of restraint sometimes, but for the most part she is characteristically unruffled and doesn't complain about her circumstances or treat Maa poorly. Mostly, she gently reprimands Maa for health reasons, for instance, that Maa shouldn't worry and go to sleep instead; at other times, she tries to stop Maa from going on and on if she feels that Maa is saying something to cause embarrassment or awkwardness.

**Practical** Jamini is very down-to-earth and, being a rural woman, doesn't know or care much about urban behaviour patterns or possible *faux pas* like not inviting male strangers right into her bedroom. For her, it's entirely a practical matter to go and greet the guests and speak to her cousin privately, even though it gives Dipu and Anil quite a shock and earns her the nickname "graveyard rose". But most of all, she understands that pity and an awkward situation forced Subhash's hand in promising to marry her, and, instead of misunderstanding or being coy, she seeks out Subhash for a direct conversation. Though Subhash disappoints by not engaging with the topic at all, this acknowledgment shows a maturity beyond her years, especially because they are mutually attracted to each other.



## THEMES

### *Exploration*

The film, like the short story, begins with an invitation to explore the unknown. In the short story, the literal ‘bait’ is a wondrous fish found only in the remote village of Telenapota, which the second-person protagonist (“you”) wants to catch as a seasoned angler. In the film, Subhash feels thoroughly claustrophobic in the concrete jungle of the city and accepts Dipu’s offer of spending a long weekend in a remote village with little hesitation. His “bait” is an opportunity to add to his portfolio by photographing village life. Dipu also tells him that the ruins of the massive mansion are marvellously picturesque, so Subhash can’t wait to be there, so much so that he goes exploring even in the middle of the night. And many sequences are devoted Subhash simply roaming around, taking pictures of everything from ducks to pillars to Jamini and the temple priest, going “click-click-click” as Gauri reports to Jamini, giggling and excited like a young girl. The camera, too, lovingly and repeatedly captures the once majestic but now dilapidated city-like complex of buildings from different angles and viewpoints. Recurring images are an aerial view of the whole complex, long corridors and a courtyard with many tall pillars reaching to the roofless sky. Sen actually shot at a different location for these pillars and then seamlessly combined the footage from two locations to give the appearance of a single space; in fact, many critics consider *Khandhar* to be a stunning example of location shooting.

The plot, too, is a reworking of the trope of “exploration as conquest”, which keeps the history of colonialism in India in mind. Colonialism (and decolonization) is central to much of Premendra Mitra’s work and Sen follows that trajectory here. The setting is that an outsider male arrives at a secluded location and his only options are: (1) to conquer and claim the female/s as his own, or (2) make false promises and escape the location unscathed, or (3) remain indifferent: this last doesn’t usually make for a dramatic realist story but is often used in Science Fiction and Fantasy. The master-stroke of this particular narrative is how it combines all three elements successfully.



### *Class*

Further, for Subhash, exploration also means observation and non-interference to the maximum extent possible, much like classical ethnography, that is, without accounting for the effect of the observer on the observed. For instance, Subhash repeatedly tells the temple

priest to “act normally” in front of the camera, but the latter freezes up and gets stiff. Subhash seems to be content in his conviction that he should not disturb the current state of affairs, but only observe and preserve in the filmic medium, barely touching the surface, like skipping stones on the water, which he likes to do.

This aloofness may be a personal trait, but remembering that in Sen’s films, the “personal is always political”, it is safe to argue that the camera here is a tool of self-defence and power. As a critic (Samik Bandyopadhyay) argues, “The camera lens placed between the self and the reality is a mediator, (which) gives the man behind the camera a false sense of possession and power...bent on observing and recording, but escaping the environment.” Subhash’s refusal to honour his promise to Maa and instead blaming Dipu for putting him in that position highlights the same entrenched middle-class traits seen previously in *Kharij*. Dipu, too, in a characteristic middle-class “shifting of the blame”, refuses to be held responsible for his cousin sister’s marriage and future. And Anil acts as almost the veritable conscience of the middle class when he asserts that it’s not *their* problem to solve; four years later, maybe another “Niranjan” would appear to provide deliverance. Needless to say, the middle-class, urbanite friends think nothing of touring the village, causing major upheavals and leaving too many indelible emotional scars and heartbreaks in their wake.



### ***Friendship***

*Khandhar* is also an ode to friendship of a kind common in 1980’s urban India but rarely seen today. In the very first scene, Dipu just pops in and tells Subhash that the trip is already planned and he’d better be ready next Thursday or else. The camaraderie between the three friends (Dipu, Subhash and Anil) is also unmistakable; they point out interesting things and people to each other, laugh at each other’s jokes and facetious comments, share a room while not encroaching on each other’s space and habits, cook and eat together and so on. One of the funniest moments occurs when Anil, expertly cutting a live chicken, is called out by Dipu to have been a butcher in a previous life— a quite disrespectful thing to do, given the lower class and caste denominations of most professional butchers. Anil, however, has a snappy and even more insulting comeback; he tells Dipu that *his* grandfather, actually, must have been a butcher for him to recognize the talent! Subhash, continuing the jokes, quips that said grandfather must have been reincarnated (as Anil) after dying from malaria, feeding back into their previous conversation of how the family and grounds came to be in ruins. They well know the art of making light of serious things not under their control and for the most part it’s “fun and games” for them.

Their friendship is also strong enough to withstand serious disagreements, as when Anil points out that Subhash had overstepped his limits when he spoke to Jamini privately, and

during the drawn-out argument between Dipu and Subhash where Dipu is angry that Subhash made a false promise to Maa, acquiescing to her pitiful request to marry Jamini. Dipu is vehement that his cousin's future is not his responsibility and Subhash had no business interfering in their family matters. Subhash, a little more calmly, retorts that they placed him in an impossible situation where he didn't have a choice but say "yes". Anil breaks up the argument like a good friend, pointing out the obvious, that they would be gone in two days and it really wasn't something to fight about as it wasn't a long term or pressing concern. Was Subhash, a complete stranger, actually expected to marry Jamini out of compassion and goodness of his heart after a brief meeting? No one thought so, not even Jamini herself.



### **Attraction**

That is not to say that no sparks fly between Subhash and Jamini. There is quite a bit of a romantic undercurrent, highlighted by a light, sweet and bouncy background score that accompanies every chance meeting between Subhash and Jamini, whether or not they speak to each other. Their shy smiles and body language also make their mutual attraction evident. Jamini finds him captivating and tells Maa about him, with a wistful look, because she knows that no matter how much she pines for him, he will never come back for her. Subhash also tries his best to treat Jamini as one of his photographic subjects but fails to remain solely a distant observer. He is fascinated by her from the very first glance, with Jamini framed inside a barred window at night, focused under his flashlight from the terrace. But simultaneously, he can't shed his "detached observer" persona either and engage in anything beyond the permissible. After speaking to her for the first time, he daydreams about her dressed as a pretty bride, descending the brightly lit staircase of a palace, as if coming towards him. He is thoroughly impressed with Jamini's emotional maturity (and tells his friends so) after she calls him aside and tells him, all while patting and feeding her pet baby goat, that she understood why he had to lie to Maa and she doesn't expect him to come through on his promise. The baby goat actually becomes an intermediary in their unstated romance, as the affection shown towards it is "transferred affection", a common element of erotic expression according to the centuries-old Indian aesthetic theory of *rasa* found in, for instance, the *Kamasutra*. This little detail becomes relevant when later, Subhash, with the excuse of taking photographs, clearly goes looking for Jamini in the same place— but now only the baby goat is roaming there, with no sign of Jamini. Later at night, Subhash continues speculating about Jamini's fate: perhaps she will never get married and take care of her sister's household instead. This is a stock trope for spurned/ unsuccessful romance in Bengali (and North



Indian) culture generally, in that one wishes that the object of one's affections would live the rest of their lives alone, pining for them. This is again a departure from the original short story, where no such sentiments are expressed and instead the second person protagonist's memories fade after a bout of malaria right after returning to Kolkata. And of course, just before leaving, Subhash runs back into the mansion grounds, perhaps to get one last look at Jamini, but defaults to taking a picture of her framed by the ruins instead.



### ***Love***

Romantic love is, however, sidelined in the film by filial love between parent and child, Maa and Jamini. Maa always praises Jamini to the skies, with a bit of healthy criticism thrown in (that she doesn't dress up to look pretty, for example) to anyone within earshot. But for the most part, their lonely lives revolve around each other. No matter how much they quibble and disagree, they are inseparable. This appears true regardless of Maa's disability and high support needs; Jamini cares for her willingly and out of love and duty, more than anything else. For instance, her daughter and son-in-law asked them many times to move to the city, but Maa always refused, citing the custom that parents don't live with their married daughters. In actuality, however, she is afraid of moving away from her only home and cannot bear the thought of Jamini not being by her side and possibly treated as a household helper there. Instead, she wants a much better life for Jamini by getting her married to a reliable person, Niranjana, who ironically turns out not to be reliable at all. Jamini, too, refuses to be separated from her mother at any cost, even the cost of marriage. After a day of constant bickering, Jamini asks Maa if she's a burden (as in, unmarried daughters being a social burden on their parents) and how Maa would remain by herself after getting her married off. Maa finally agrees to leave the ruins and says she will go and live with Jamini.

The bitterness is washed away by their tears and Jamini, hugging her, says that she's the best mother ever. Even when, at the end, Jamini, dealing with her own heartbreak, lashes out at Maa's hurtful words and says that she should have lost the ability of speech, she regrets it immediately. Then she breaks down in tears, hugging Maa and apologizing for her lies. No matter how many "Niranjans" come and go, the mother-daughter bond proves to be truer and more enduring.



### ***Loneliness***

Another driving theme of *Khandhar* is loneliness, expressed right from the very first scene, when Subhash develops a picture in his darkroom, alone in the twilight. The voice-over, accompanying Subhash's silent and lonely evenings in the backdrop of a brightly lit city, also describes the ennui of the concrete jungle. He may be busy with work, but he's certainly missing any real personal connection. Apart from his friends, who are also busy in their own lives, he doesn't appear to have any familial or romantic relationships. So, the temptation to get out of there even for a few days is welcome, though Subhash is hesitant at first. In fact, he is a lonesome character who doesn't "fit in" anywhere and gives off an air of detachment even when he's with his friends. This is seen time and again during the trip, when he leaves his friends to explore the ruins and take pictures. His professional persona as someone behind the camera, always observing but never immersing himself or opening up to vulnerability, also contributes to his loneliness.

The loneliness of the bustling concrete jungle is contrasted with that of the sprawling ruins, where owls nest on the rafters, crickets chirp all night and there are only four other people in the vicinity. The mansion itself exudes loneliness: set at the edge of a forest, in complete disrepair with sections already having fallen down and other places that could collapse at any moment, and a courtyard of pillars, perhaps once a spacious entertainment chamber of some sort, now standing roofless under clear skies. It is the desolation of being lost to time itself, forgotten, a palimpsest of the past encroaching upon the present. In this space, Jamini's loneliness takes on a different dimension. Her days, solely devoted to taking care of her disabled and irritable mother, with no respite and hardly any company, is forlorn at best. But she bears her life willingly, out of love and duty, and does not actively seek out escape like her city-dwelling cousin Dipu and his friends. She could well have chosen to get married or go and live with her sister elsewhere, but she doesn't do that as Maa isn't willing to move away.



### ***Self-delusion***

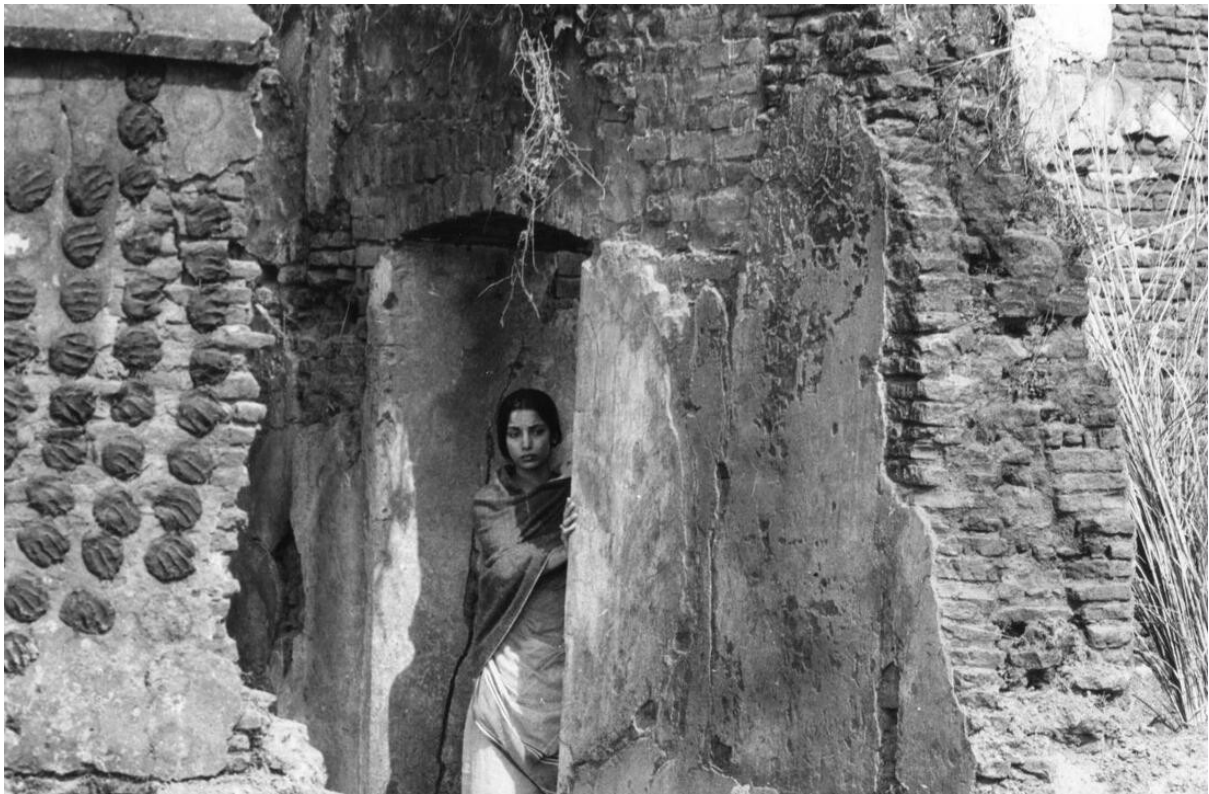
Characters in the film suffer from self-delusion in varying degrees. The friends convince themselves that a few days away from their humdrum city lives will provide some rest and relaxation. However, they face various hardships, like the long and unconformable journey, unforgiving cold weather, sub-par accommodations and having to do many of their own chores like cooking by themselves.

But the most striking example is Maa, who, paralysed and blind, also suffers from depression. Her fragile mental state exacerbates her delusions about “Niranjan” having promised to marry Jamini and deliver them from the ruins. While the real Niranjan did visit once and she had made marriage plans with him, Maa becomes obsessed in thinking that everyone else will honour the agreement. So much so, that as soon as she hears about Dipu’s visit, she assumes that Niranjan has finally come to relieve her suffering. In fact, all of her conversations in the film revolve around this single topic. Maa constantly wants to know what Niranjan does all day and if he is being well taken care of and so on. In fact, she is completely unbothered by what anyone else thinks of her words and is often reprimanded by Jamini to stop talking since she is embarrassing herself. For instance, when Gauri comes to borrow dishes, Maa becomes concerned that the young men aren’t letting her (Gauri) help with the cooking and asks after Niranjan, confusing Gauri. Maa soon starts nagging Jamini about meeting Dipu and friends and deciding the details of the marriage. She also harps on and on that Jamini’s marriage with Niranjan is the only thing keeping her alive and begs “Niranjan” quite pitifully, not recognizing that it is a completely different person, Subhash. But perhaps, deep in her heart, she knows that she’s deluding herself, as she takes Jamini’s explanation at the end of the film about the friends leaving (without any preparations for the wedding) almost stoically and doesn’t have a big reaction as expected.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) The film has only seven named characters. Aside from Subhash and Jamini, who was the most impactful character that you would have liked to see more of and why?
- 2) How does the location influence the development of the plot?
- 3) If Subhash and Jamini are both lonely and attracted to each other, why do you think they make no effort to further their budding romance?
- 4) Discuss the family dynamics of Jamini and Maa. Which aspect most struck a chord with you?
- 5) Do you think that the friends' justifications of their inherent callousness and shirking of responsibility to each other hold any merit?
- 6) Do you think Subhash could/ should have reacted differently to Maa and followed through with his promise to marry Jamini?



## SCENES

### Opening Credits

Subhash exposes a photograph in a chemical bath in his darkroom. In the large photo, a young woman stands at the door of a ruined mansion. Opening credits follow.

### Opening Scene

A voice-over narrator (Naseeruddin Shah, playing Subhash) details the ennui of urban living while Subhash cleans up and lights a cigarette. Narrator continues that the soul only seeks to escape into a still world frozen in time, unchanging; we are shown some city photographs while Subhash touches up a photo with a paintbrush. Subhash looks at the camera and asks if we would also like to go there, if invited by a friend.

### Dipu visits Subhash and proposes a trip to the ruins

Dipu, a close friend of Subhash, visits. They discuss photographs and Dipu scolds Subhash for smoking such bitter cigarettes. Dipu tells him that they and another friend, Anil, are going to visit his ancestral mansion next week. That house, in a far-off village, has long been in ruins and he hasn't had a chance to visit lately. He has already sent word that they will go for the weekend. Dipu says that they will have to travel by bullock cart for the last few miles, adding, "It will be an experience."



### Riding a bus

The three friends ride on a long-distance public bus. Dipu points out a newly-wed couple, still in their wedding attire. They should reach by evening, Dipu reassures them; the house caretaker-cum-driver should be there with the bullock cart at the bus stop. A random young man keeps dozing off and drooling on the shoulder of the older man sitting next to him, much to the latter's annoyance.

### A bullock cart ride

A bullock cart, barely visible but very loud, is driven down the road. The third friend, Anil, asks the half-dozing bullock cart driver his name (Harihar). Anil asks about the abundance of mosquitoes; Harihar says they are fewer outside the forest and during the day. Anil is anxious about the forest that he cannot see in the dark. They are completely wrapped up in shawls and blankets.

### **Reaching the mansion**

Dipu rouses Subhash, who had dozed off. Subhash says a famous line from the blockbuster film *Devdas*: “How much further do we go, Devdas...” Dipu shines a flashlight on the dark trees around. It is still dark when they reach the desolate mansion. Anil jokes with Harihar that it’s the Buckingham Palace. Harihar’s daughter, Gauri, greets them; Dipu remembers her as a young girl. One of them parodies a ghost, “Boo-ooo” and is told to shut up.

### **Uncomfortable accommodations**

Harihar says that it’s been colder than usual lately. The friends enter their allotted room. Harihar tells them that he has done all he could, but they will be uncomfortable; so, they should spend time in the warm, sunny terrace during the day. Subhash comments on the décor. Dipu shows him a solid wooden post in the middle of the room supporting the ceiling. His flashlight beam, moving up the post, then reveals an owl nest on the rafters. Anil fears for his life, while Subhash jokes about it.

### **Subhash takes a look around**

Subhash goes to the terrace while Dipu relaxes with a drink and Anil tries to nap. It’s quite late at night so Subhash uses a flashlight to see around him. Suddenly, he sees a woman at a nearby window. The woman (Jamini) tells her mother (Maa) that guests are here, but the latter remains supine under the mosquito net and doesn’t respond. Jamini then closes the window, leaves their room and comes downstairs, all with a lantern in the dark, then closes the main door.

### **Jamini and her mother**

The next morning, Jamini washes clothes and brings water from the well. A white baby goat roams around in the mansion. Maa, who is partially paralysed and blind, tells her to go and ask the guests to come and visit her. Jamini tells her that Dipu didn’t inform her about visiting. Maa complains of chest pain. We see several shots of the once majestic, now broken-down palace, almost as large as a small city. One of the walls is adorned with drying cow-dung cakes.



### **A short history of the mansion**

The three friends relax on the courtyard. Subhash takes photographs of the mansion and his

friends. Dipu says that an insignificant bug, a mosquito, laid the place to ruin with malaria a hundred years ago. Subhash jokes that you can't kill mosquitoes with canons (a Bengali proverb), only people. Dipu says that the people who could leave, did; no one was left to "light a lamp for their ancestors".

### **"Time! Time! The Great Destroyer!"**

Dipu's family was scattered to the winds after the government dissolved the landowning system after Independence; some of the heirs wasted away their money, others got jobs elsewhere. Subhash comments, "Time! Time! The great destroyer!" But just one family remains, Subhash continues, as he saw a young woman there last night. Anil teases Subhash for hanging out on the roof to look for her. She is Dipu's cousin, he says.

### **Jamini's day**

Jamini reads a book, cooks rice and chats with Maa, who has forgotten what day of week it is. She then brushes and ties Maa's hair. Maa says she looks nice in her blue sari and reiterates her desire to meet the guests. Gauri comes and tells Jamini that she needs utensils and chickens for the guests. Gauri says that one of the friends is a photographer and giggles.

### **Gauri borrows utensils**

Jamini and Gauri take out the utensils that were locked up in a big trunk. Maa complains that most of their things were stolen or looted. Gauri is impressed with the quality of the dishes. Maa is concerned that the young men aren't letting Gauri help with the cooking. Jamini tells her to stop worrying about it as the men are having fun. Maa asks about Nirranjan but Jamini stops her.

### **The friends cook**

Gauri makes tea for the friends. Anil cuts a live chicken. Dipu, watching, comments that he must have been a butcher in a previous life; Anil says that must have been his grandfather. Subhash prepares the vegetables and jokes that said grandfather must have been reincarnated (as Anil) after dying from malaria.



**Graveyard Rose**

Jamini walks by and sees the friends preparing to cook a huge amount of food. Dipu welcomes her. Dipu said he was planning to visit them and asks about Maa. Jamini calls Dipu aside to speak with him privately. Anil runs to Subhash and tells him that “she” came to see them; he calls her a “graveyard rose” (or “crematorium frangipani”) and applauds Subhash’s choice.

### **Dipu and Jamini speak privately**

Dipu is concerned that Maa thinks Niranjan is with them. Jamini says that Maa doesn’t want to listen to anything and has grown irritable. Jamini says Maa can’t see at all any more or even move by herself. Her older sister and brother-in-law send them money regularly and have asked them to move, but Maa refuses on grounds that one doesn’t live with one’s married daughters. Dipu asks Jamini why she isn’t getting married— is she also waiting for Niranjan like her mother? He flatly states that Niranjan will never come again. Jamini requests Dipu to meet Maa but not to reveal anything about Niranjan.



### **The friends discuss Niranjan**

After lunch, Harihar washes the dishes and says they will heat up the leftovers for dinner. The friends relax in their room. Dipu tells them that Niranjan is a distant relative of Maa’s, and they had arranged that he would marry Jamini. He visited four years ago and promised Maa that he would marry Jamini, but he lied; he’s now married and settled somewhere else. Subhash asks if Jamini knows about it. Dipu is convinced that Maa will die of heartbreak as soon as she finds out that Niranjan won’t ever return.

### **Dipu and Subhash visit Jamini and Maa**

Subhash goes with Dipu to visit Maa and Jamini. Subhash feels lost in the ruins; even Dipu is confused. But they are in the right place. Jamini invites them in. Dipu introduces them to each other. They are all awkward.

### **“Niranjan” promises to marry Jamini**

Maa is overjoyed that Dipu came to see her. Jamini struggles to turn her on her side on the bed. Jamini calls Subhash to enter, but Maa thinks it is Niranjan and doesn’t let them get a word in edgewise. Maa tells “Niranjan” that she’s only alive waiting for him to come. They all remain silent. Maa asks Dipu to fix the marriage (between Jamini and ‘Niranjan’) as in her paralysed state, she is constantly irritable and a burden on her daughter and so on. Jamini tells



her to stop talking. Maa continues to plead with “Niranjan” to marry Jamini, who can’t stop her words. Moved, Subhash says, “Yes”. They are all shocked. Maa finally relaxes.

### **The friends quarrel over Subhash’s false promise**

Dipu tells Subhash that he shouldn’t have made false promises. Subhash says he didn’t have a choice as they forced his hand. Anil tries to stop them quarrelling, saying that they would be leaving in two days and Dipu should try and get his sister married off so that her mother can die in peace. Dipu isn’t interested in taking on the responsibility, as no one would marry a young woman with a paralysed mother. Dipu says that at least Maa was reassured for the next four years; maybe another “Niranjan” would appear after then.

### **Gauri checks in on Jamini**

Gauri tells Jamini that the friends will leave the day after tomorrow. They seem to be enjoying the ruins. She reports that the friends were quarrelling about Subhash’s visit, but Jamini assures her that nothing happened.

### **Subhash and Jamini speak**

Subhash relaxes by the pond next to the mansion. Suddenly, he notices Jamini on the terrace. Romantic music plays in the background. Subhash turns away and leaves, but Jamini has come downstairs and calls to him, pet white baby goat in tow. She thanks him for considering Maa’s pleas. Subhash tries to lighten the mood by joking about the pet goat’s bleating.

### **Jamini and Maa quarrel**

Later that night, Jamini reads to Maa. Maa asks what the friends do all day, especially “Niranjan”. Jamini says that he goes click-click, taking pictures all day, even hers. Maa can’t sleep and asks Jamini why “Niranjan” hadn’t checked up on them and tries to find out more. But Jamini has nothing to say. Maa shouts at her for not being direct with “Niranjan” about the marriage. Jamini tries to calm her down and fall asleep. Subhash and Jamini both remain awake. He daydreams of a prettily dressed Jamini descending the brightly lit staircase of a palace.



### **The next morning**

Gauri and Harihar joke that the friends start yelling “Tea! Tea!” like crows going “Caw! Caw!” at the break of dawn. Anil takes his tea in bed and Dipu in the living room; Subhash is still asleep.

### **Jamini and Maa reconcile**

Jamini prepares *tulsi* juice for Maa and feeds it to her. Maa tells Jamini to invite “Niranjan” for lunch. Jamini kindly asks Maa if she’s a burden and how she would remain by herself after sending her off to her in-laws’ after marriage. Maa says she will go with Jamini (to the in-laws place). They hug and cry. Jamini says that she’s the best mother ever.



### **The friends have a relaxed morning**

Subhash takes photographs of Jamini worshipping at the temple. Jamini notices him, but doesn’t speak to him. Subhash photographs the temple priest, who becomes stiff and self-conscious in front of the camera. Later, the friends relax on the terrace. Subhash asks Dipu about the temple. Dipu says there were 10 or 12 temples originally, but all except one are in ruins. Harihar, serving them tea, says there is barely any worship there now.

### **Dipu and Subhash discuss Jamini**

Subhash remembers Jamini walking by after the ritual in the temple. He tells his friends about that. Dipu chastises him for being too forward. He tells them about meeting with Jamini the day before, and praises her for being sensitive and understanding. Dipu says she had no choice. Subhash is concerned about what will happen. Dipu, being practical, says that after Maa’s death, Jamini will probably move in with her married sister and hopefully have an arranged marriage.

### **Subhash thinks about Jamini**

Later at night, Subhash continues speculating about Jamini’s fate: perhaps she will never get married and will take care of her sister's household instead. And slowly she will forget these ruins and the ruined years of her life.

### **A last meeting**

The next morning, Subhash roams around with his camera, clicking pictures of the space and the people. Walking by the pond, he remembers Jamini calling out to him—but now there’s only the baby goat. Jamini meets him unexpectedly. She asks him to come and take Maa’s picture and whether they are leaving that day.

### **Farewell**

Anil and Dipu ask Subhash to hurry up. They all prepare to leave in the bullock cart. Jamini

watches them from the terrace. Subhash runs back inside to Jamini's part of the house and takes some pictures. He sees her peeking from within the ruins and takes her picture, thanking her. We see a montage of some light-hearted moments that Subhash spent in the ruins and speaking with Jamini.



### **The truth is revealed to Maa**

Jamini leans sadly on the wall, then returns to her room. Maa asks about the friends. She rants on about how she couldn't go and meet them, how Jamini should talk to them and not be stubborn and answer her questions. Jamini finally snaps and says that Maa's disease should have made her incapable of speech, too. But she immediately regrets it and apologizes, breaking down in tears and confesses that she was lying all along. Gauri hears them but does not interrupt and walks away.

### **Closing scene**

Back at his photography studio at home, Subhash has hung up some new pictures, including one of Jamini. He points his camera towards us, clicking away, while the camera zooms in on the picture of Jamini on the wall behind him.

