



Pratidwandi (The Adversary) is a 1970 subtitled feature drama from India directed by Satyajit Ray. It begins the “Calcutta Trilogy,” three films set in the city of Calcutta without overlapping characters or storylines. The underlying theme of each is corruption.

Pratidwandi is a prospective LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library of Ligonier, Pennsylvania.

10 of a possible 20 points = **1/2 = a middling movie

India 1970 black-and-white 110 minutes subtitled live action feature drama
Priya Films Producers: Nepal Dutta and Arim Dutta a Shradha dvd release

Key: * indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

Points:

- 1 Direction: Satyajit Ray
- 0 Editing: Dulal Dutta
- 1 Cinematography: Soumendu Roy and Purnendu Bose
Stills: Nemai Ghosh*
- 1 Lighting: Hemanta Das and Tapan Sen

- 0 Screenplay: Satyajit Ray, based on the novel *Pratidwandi* by Sunil Ganguli
- Music Recording: Satyen Chatterjee
- 2 Music: Satyajit Ray*
- 2 Art Direction: Bansi Chandrugupta
- Backdrops: Kabi Dasgupta
- Makeup: Ananta Das
- 2 Sound: J. D. Irani* and Durgudas Mitra*
- 1 Acting
- 0 Creativity

10 total points

Cast: Dhritiman Chatterjee (Siddhartha Chowdhury), Indira Devi (Sarojini), Debraj Roy (Tunu, Siddhartha's younger brother), Krishna Bose (Sutapa, Siddhartha's younger sister), Kalyan Chowdhury (Siben), Joysree Roy a.k.a. Jayshree Roy a.k.a. Jayasree Kabir* (Keya), Miss Sefali (Lotika), Soven Lahiri* (Sanyal, Sutapa's boss), Pisu Majumdar (Keya's father), Dhara Roy (Keya's aunt), Mamata Chatterjee (Sanyal's wife), others

One of Satyajit Ray's most experimental films, *Pratidwandi* suffers from excessive use of such fragmenting, showy new wave techniques as photo negative imaging, jump cuts to dream flashbacks, and blurry, frenetic tracking shots. Ray dons his groovy duds here and even includes a scene with touring hippies eulogizing the hip scene they think they've discovered in a Calcutta park. A time capsule relic of the Swinging Sixties, *The Adversary* clearly shows influence from such films as Godard's *A bout de soufflé* (*Breathless*), Tarkovsky's *Ivanovo Detstvo* (*Ivan's Childhood*), and Ray's own *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* with its dancing ghosts.

The plot of *The Adversary* follows a college student's abortive attempts to find himself a job in the tension-wracked city of Calcutta circa 1970. Siddhartha is the eldest of three children. He's annoyed and frustrated that younger sister Sutapa has landed employment and even a promotion. His brother Tunu is in the process of deserting academic studies for active engagement in revolutionary terrorism.

Unemployed Siddhartha is indisposed towards long-term commitment to anything: job, cause, field of study, even Che Guevara. Fumbling job interviews,

misinterpreting Sutapa's evening absences, frittering away whatever money his late father left for his education on passing whims such as Swedish semi-pornographic films and girlie magazines, the goalless young intellectual is unattractively sterile and as hypocritical as interviewers he denounces.

Even when an educated, sincerely supportive young woman attempts to flirt with him, this restless soul anchored to the past resists, initially cutting short time spent in her company and later only grudgingly consenting to write Keya when life paths lead them apart.

Siddhartha's dreams drag him back to childhood, permitting frozen views of siblings as they were growing up. Their altered relationships after reaching maturity are intolerable for him to deal with. So he imagines violent, radical changes: Tunu executed as a political martyr and Sutapa becoming a nurse practicing prostitution as a sideline. These flights of fancy feature his brother and sister in roles demeaning or suicidal. Supposedly their vocational choices will lead them inevitably to disastrous conclusions.

By not himself making a career decision, Siddhartha maintains himself alive and respectable. Or so he believes. Keeping aloof from both the busyness of business and the inflamed passions of nationalistic socialism – these modern India's Scylla and Charybdis – seems the best path for a thinking person to take.

Is it indeed? Keya presents an alternative: dedication to a socially useful cause or job. Wouldn't it be better to obtain an education leading to some useful position in society? She's partly driven by hope of escaping an aunt turning stepmother and a father content to lose himself in the daily pattern of familiar schedule and vocational routine.

Keya's dad is a doctor who has lost youthful idealism. Now affluent, the man cannot understand why intelligent young Indian males can't rise up the social and economic ladder he ascended. Hard work and sacrifice should still boost them to a high rung. Or is the prospect of bureaucratic sinecures too great a siren call?

It seems Ray feared Calcutta faced a depressingly chaotic future. Unsure of itself, just like Siddhartha, it was taking baby steps forward. However, decisive and firm ones would be required to keep society from falling apart. Revolution and bloodshed led nowhere satisfactory. Too much time was being devoted to ideology separating people into oppositional categories: rich versus poor,

employed versus jobless, old versus young. Individuals should be working together, not pulling apart. This adversarial atmosphere was absolutely toxic.

A paternal death opens this film, displayed in blurry negative exposures. It concludes with a protagonist son listening to a funeral procession outside his euphemistically designated “hotel.” A fondly remembered birdcall from Siddhartha’s youth mingles with ritual funerary chanting. Life mixed with death, hope with disillusionment. It will be up to him to resolve which becomes his guide and aspiration.

By far the best performance here is that turned in by Joysree Roy a.k.a. Jayshree Roy a.k.a. Jayasree Kabir in the role of Keya. She’s shy and alluring, clever and naïve, a yin-yang combo special winsomely presented with full credibility. In fact, Ray would have been better counseled to make her romance with Siddhartha a feature film unto itself. Viewers see too little of her and quite a bit too much of an unsympathetic Dhrutiman Chatterjee, tasked with embodying a character who inspires booing rather than ardent huzzahs. One of life’s predestined losers.

Other cast members are satisfactory, though hardly memorable.

The screenplay by Ray himself lacks commendable dialogue and leads to no revelations. It resembles in some respects an Indian version of Fellini’s *I Vitelloni* (*The Layabouts*) about similarly lethargically inclined young men who mostly prefer partying and shirking responsibility to any tasks requiring hard labor, diligence, or creative thinking. Fellini had no great sympathy for such underachievers; Ray seemed inclined to defend those individuals as misfits created by social pressures rather than personal immaturity and negligence.

A true bonus is Ray’s original music for this film. His instrumentation leads to sharp, jagged punctuations buttressing thematic rippings of social fabric and human relationships. These abound in this drama. It’s a gloomy, trenchant score perfectly matched to Calcutta’s decadence and corruption during the late Sixties and early Seventies.

Editing, as fractured and often frantic as pacing in street scenes here, contributes more than minimally to confusion. Especially in flashbacks arriving with no introductions and ending just as abruptly. There’s far too much choppiness as a result.

Cinematography, held hostage to stylistic experiments which add no value whatsoever to the film, never reaches a satisfactorily settled plateau of artistry,

let alone any heights. The camera is too mobile, frequently rushing madly down city streets without providing adequate time for audiences to register specific faces or places.

Interiors receive greater care, with Bansi Chandragupta's set decorations encouraging viewers to inspect rooms carefully for indications of affluence or poverty, refinement or crudity. Telling shots of non-operating fans, a rusted fuse-box, and a Qantas advertising poster disclose optimal cooperation between art department and cinematographer.

Lighting is generally above average for its time period. Hemanta Das and Tapan Sen had to fight an uphill battle, however, against Ray's penchant at this time for overexposures and high-speed tracking shots that obliterated details.

Sound recording merits acclamation. J. D. Irani and Durgadas Mitra provided exemplary captures of birdcalls (Mitra handling those), traffic sounds, Hindu chants, child exclamations, and telephone rings.

Certainly not one of Ray's classics, *Pratidwandi* does supply opportunity to see just how daring he could be in crafting film structure.

With an unusual pileup of gore, one explosion, Siddhartha's climactic outburst of physical and verbal revolt, a scene centered on graphic analysis of female anatomical structure, and its underlying theme of prostitution being given great prominence, *The Adversary* is very much a film exclusively appropriate for adults.