

= Devika Rani =

Devika Rani Chaudhuri , usually known as Devika Rani (30 March 1908 ? 9 March 1994) , was an actress in Indian films who was active during the 1930s and 1940s . Widely acknowledged as the first lady of Indian cinema , Devika Rani had a successful film career that spanned 10 years .

Devika Rani 's early years were mostly spent in London where she studied architecture , and started her career as a textile engineer . In 1928 , she met Himanshu Rai , an Indian film @-@ producer , who persuaded her to join his production crew . She assisted in costumes design and art direction for Rai 's film A Throw of Dice (1929) . The two married in 1929 , and went to Germany where Devika Rani learned different aspects of film @-@ making in the UFA Studios in Berlin . Rai then cast her in the 1933 talkie Karma in which her performance received critical acclaim . Returning to India , the couple established their production studio Bombay Talkies in 1934 . They produced many women @-@ centric films throughout the decade , with Devika Rani portraying lead roles in most of them . Her on @-@ screen pairing with Ashok Kumar became popular in India .

Following Rai 's death in 1940 , Devika Rani took over the control of the studio and produced several films . At the peak of her career she retired from films , and in 1945 she married Russian painter Svetoslav Roerich , leading thereafter life of a recluse . Her persona and roles in films were often considered socially unconventional . Her awards include the Padmashri (1958) , Dadasaheb Phalke Award (1970) and the Soviet Land Nehru Award (1990) .

= = Family and background = =

Devika Rani was born into a Bengali family in Waltair near Visakhapatnam in present @-@ day Andhra Pradesh . Her father , Col. Manmatha Nath Chaudhuri , was the first Indian Surgeon @-@ General of Madras Presidency . Her paternal uncles were Ashutosh Chaudhuri , Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court , the prominent Kolkata @-@ based barrister Jogesh Chandra Chaudhuri and the Bengali writer Pramatha Chaudhuri .

Devika Rani was related through both her parents to the poet and Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore.Devika 's mother , Leela Devi Chaudhuri , was the daughter of Indumati Devi Chattopadhyay , whose mother Saudamini Devi Gangopadhyay was the eldest sister of the Nobel laureate . In other words , Devika 's paternal and maternal grandmothers were first cousins to each other , being the daughters of two sisters of Rabindranath Tagore .

Devika Rani 's childhood was mostly spent in England ; at the age of nine she moved to the country where she was enrolled in a boarding school . After completing her schooling in the early 1920s , she got an admission from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) and the Royal Academy of Music in London to study acting and music . She followed that with a course in architecture , textile and decor design , and apprenticed under Elizabeth Arden . Upon completion , Devika Rani started her career as textile engineer .

= = Himanshu Rai = =

In 1928 Devika Rani first met her future husband , Himanshu Rai . Rai , an Indian barrister @-@ turned @-@ film maker , was in London preparing to shoot his forthcoming film A Throw of Dice . Rai was impressed with Devika 's " exceptional skills " and invited her to join the production team of the film , although not as an actress . She readily agreed , and traveled to India with Himanshu Rai for this assignment , assisting him in areas such as costume designing and art direction . The two also traveled to Germany for the post @-@ production work , where she had occasion to observe the film @-@ making techniques of the German film industry , specifically of G. W. Pabst and Fritz Lang . Inspired by their methods of film @-@ making , she enrolled for a film @-@ making course at Universum Film AG studio in Berlin . Devika Rani learnt various aspects of film @-@ making and additionally also took a special course in film acting .

In 1929 , shortly after the release of A Throw of Dice , Devika Rani and Himanshu Rai were married . Around this time , they both acted in a play together , for which they received many accolades in

Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries . During this time she was also trained in the production unit of Max Reinhardt , an Austrian theatre director .

= = = Film debut = = =

Devika and Himanshu Rai returned to India , where Himanshu produced a film titled Karma (1933) . The film was his first talkie , and like his previous films , it was a joint production between people from India , Germany and the United Kingdom . Rai , who played the lead role , decided to cast Devika Rani as the female lead , thus marking her acting debut . Karma is credited as having been the first English language talkie made by an Indian . It was one of the earliest Indian films to feature a kissing scene . The kissing scene , involving Himanshu Rai and Devika Rani , lasted for about four minutes , and eighty years later , this stands as the record for duration of a kissing scene in Indian cinema as of 2014 . Devika Rani also sang a song in the film , a bi @-@ lingual song in English and Hindi . This song is said to be Bollywood 's first English song .

Made simultaneously in both English and Hindi , Karma premiered in London in May 1933 . Alongside a special screening for the Royal family at Windsor , the film was well received throughout Europe . Devika Rani 's performance was internationally acclaimed as she won " rave reviews " in the London media . A critic from The Daily Telegraph noted Devika Rani for her " beauty " and " charm " while also crediting her to be a " potential star of the first magnitude " . Following the release of the film , she was invited by the B.B.C. to enact a role in their first ever television broadcast in Britain in 1933 . She also inaugurated the company 's first short wave radio transmission to India . In spite of its success in England , Karma did not interest Indian audiences and turned out be a failure in India when it was released in Hindi as Nagin Ki Ragini in early 1934 . However , the film received good critical response and helped Devika Rani establish herself as a leading actress in Indian cinema . Indian independence activist and poet Sarojini Naidu called her a " lovely and gifted little lady " .

= = = Bombay Talkies = = =

After the critical success of Karma , the couple returned to India in 1934 . Although the Hindi version of the film , released in India in 1934 , flopped without a trace , Himanshu Rai had established the required networks in Europe , and was able to start a film studio named Bombay Talkies , partnering with Niranjana Pal , a Bengali playwright and screenwriter who he had met previously in London , and Franz Osten , who directed several of Rai 's films .

Upon inception , Bombay Talkies was one of the " best @-@ equipped " film studios in the country . The studio would serve as a launch pad for future actors including Ashok Kumar , Leela Chitnis , Dilip Kumar , Raj Kapoor , Madhubala and Mumtaz . The studio 's first film Jawani Ki Hawa (1935) , a crime thriller , starring Devika Rani and Najm @-@ ul @-@ Hassan , was shot fully on a train .

= = = Elopement = = =

Najm @-@ ul @-@ Hassan was also Devika 's co @-@ star in the studio 's next venture , Jeevan Naiya . The two co @-@ stars developed a romantic relationship , and during the shooting schedule of Jeevan Naiya , Devika , a married Hindu woman , eloped with Hassan , a married Muslim man . Himanshu was both enraged and distraught . Since the leading pair were absent , production was stalled . A significant portion of the movie had been shot and a large sum of money , which had been taken as credit from financiers , had been spent . The studio therefore suffered severe financial losses and a loss of credit among bankers in the city while the runaway couple made merry .

Sashadhar Mukherjee , an assistant sound @-@ engineer at the studio , had a brotherly bond with Devika Rani because both of them were Bengalis and spoke that language with each other . He established contact with the runaway couple and managed to convince Devika Rani to return to her husband . In the India of that era , divorce was legally almost impossible and women who eloped were regarded as no better than whores and were shunned by their own families . In her heart of

hearts , Devika Rani knew that she could not secure a divorce or marry Hassan under any circumstances . She negotiated with her husband through the auspices of Sashadhar Mukherjee , seeking the separation of her finances from those of her husband as a condition for her return . Henceforth , she would be paid separately for working in his films , but he would be required to single @-@ handedly pay the household expenses for the home in which both of them would live . Himanshu agreed to this , in order to save face in society and to prevent his studio from going bankrupt . Devika Rani returned to her marital home . However , things would never be the same between husband and wife again , and it is said that thenceforth , their relationship was largely confined to work and little or no intimacy transpired between them after this episode .

Despite the additional expense involved in re @-@ shooting many portions of the film , Himanshu Rai replaced Najm @-@ ul @-@ Hassan with Ashok Kumar , who was the brother of Sashadhar Mukherjee 's wife , as the hero of Jeevan Naiya . This marked the debut , improbable as it may seem , of Ashok Kumar 's five @-@ decade @-@ long career in Hindi films . Najm @-@ ul @-@ Hassan was dismissed from his job at Bombay Talkies (this was the period in which actors and actresses were paid regular monthly salaries by one specific film studio and could not work in any other studio) . His reputation as a dangerous cad established , he could not find work in any other studio . His career was ruined and he sank into obscurity .

= = = Golden era of Bombay Talkies = = =

Achhut Kanya (1936) , the studio 's next production was a tragedy drama that had Devika Rani and Ashok Kumar portraying the roles of an untouchable girl and a Brahmin boy who fall in love . The film is considered a " landmark " in Indian cinema as it challenged the caste system in the country . The casting of Devika Rani was considered a mismatch as her looks did not match the role of a poor untouchable girl by virtue of her " upper @-@ class upbringing " . However , her pairing with Ashok Kumar became popular and they went on to star in as many as ten films together with most of them being Bombay Talkies productions .

In the 1930s , Bombay Talkies produced several women @-@ centric films with Devika Rani playing the lead role in all of them . In majority of the films produced by the studio , she was paired opposite Ashok Kumar , who was " overshadowed " by her . Jeevan Prabhat , released in 1937 , saw a role @-@ reversal between Devika Rani and Ashok Kumar ? she played a higher @-@ caste Brahmin woman who is mistaken by society of having an extra @-@ marital affair with an untouchable man . Her next release Izzat (1937) , based on Romeo and Juliet , was set in the medieval period and depicted two lovers belonging to enemy clans of a Maratha empire . Nirmala , released in the following year , dealt with the plight of a child @-@ less woman who is told by an astrologer to abandon her husband to ensure successful pregnancy . In Vachan , her second release of the year , she played a Rajput princess . Durga , her only release in 1939 , was a romantic drama that told the story of an orphaned girl and a village doctor , played by Ashok Kumar .

= = = Widowhood and studio decline = = =

Following the death of Rai in 1940 , there was a rift between two parties of the Bombay Talkies led by Mukherjee and Amiya Chakravarty . Devika Rani assumed principal responsibility and took over the studio along with Mukherjee . In 1941 , she produced and acted in Anjaan co @-@ starring Ashok Kumar . In the subsequent years , she produced two successful films under the studio ? Basant and Kismet ? both starring Ashok Kumar . Kismet (1943) contained anti @-@ British messages (India was under British rule at that time) and turned out to be a " record @-@ breaking " film . Devika Rani made her last film appearance in Hamari Baat (1943) , which had Raj Kapoor playing a small role . She handpicked newcomer Dilip Kumar for a role in Jwar Bhata (1944) , produced by her on behalf of the studio . An internal politics that arose in the studio led prominent personalities including Mukherjee and Ashok Kumar to part ways with her and set up a new studio called Filmistan . Due to lack of support and interest , Devika Rani decided to quit the film industry .

In an interview to journalist Raju Bharatan , she mentioned that her idea of not willing to compromise on " artistic values " of film @-@ making as one of the major reasons for her quitting the industry .

= = Roerich and retirement = =

Following her retirement from films , Devika Rani married Russian painter Svetoslav Roerich , son of Russian artist Nicholas Roerich , in 1945 . After marriage , the couple moved to Manali , Himachal Pradesh where they got acquainted with the Nehru family . During her stay in Manali , Devika Rani made a few documentaries on wildlife . After staying in Manali for some years , they moved to Bangalore , Karnataka , and settled there managing an export company . The couple bought a 450 acres (1 @, @ 800 @, @ 000 m2) estate on the outskirts of the city and led a solitary life for the rest of their lives . She died of bronchitis on 9 March 1994 ? a year after Roerich died ? in Bangalore . At her funeral , Devika Rani was given full state honors . Following her death , the estate was on litigation for many years as the couple had no legal claimants ; Devika Rani remained childless throughout her life . In August 2011 , the Government of Karnataka acquired the estate after the Supreme Court of India passed the verdict in favour of them .

= = Persona and legacy = =

Devika Rani was called the first lady of Indian cinema . She is credited for being one of the earliest personalities who took the position of Indian cinema to global standards . Her films were mostly tragic romantic dramas that contained social themes . The roles played by her in films of Bombay Talkies usually involved in romantic relationship with men who were unusual for the social norms prevailing in the society at that time , mainly for their caste background or community identity . Devika Rani was highly influenced by the German cinema by virtue of her training at the UFA Studios ; Although she was influenced by German actress Marlene Dietrich , her acting style was compared to Greta Garbo , thus leading to Devika Rani being named the " Indian Garbo " . Devika Rani 's attire , both in films and sometimes in real life , were considered " risque " at that time . In his book Bless You Bollywood ! : A tribute to Hindi Cinema on completing 100 years , Tilak Rishi mentions that Devika Rani was known as the " Dragon Lady " for her " smoking , drinking , cursing and hot temper " .

In 1958 , the Government of India honoured Devika Rani with a Padma Shri , the country 's fourth highest civilian honour . She became the first ever recipient of the Dadasaheb Phalke Award , the country 's highest award for films , when it was instituted in 1969 . In 1990 , Soviet Russia honoured her with the " Soviet Land Nehru Award " . A postage stamp commemorating her was released by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology in February 2011 .

= = Filmography = =