

The Glory that Was: An Exploration of the Iconicity of New Theatres¹

SHARMISTHA GOOPTU

New Theatres, created in 1930 by Birendra Nath Sircar, had an important role in the creation of the Indian film industry. Functioning from Calcutta, it was not just a well-equipped studio; it was a system, a way of life for the people working with it. . . . Sircar wanted not just cinema halls and a studio; he wanted a system. A pervasive, self-supporting, effectively-managed, supremely equipped, net-work of men and women and machines which would sell the celluloid dream like it had never been sold before in the country...²

As in the above extract, most available literature on New Theatres, Bengal's leading film-producing concern in the 1930s and early '40s, exudes a celebratory rhetoric. The romantic discourse surrounding New Theatres is one of the enduring nostalgias of the Bengali *bhadralok*³. The above quote indicates that the New Theatres ethos, though glorified for its efficiency, commercial viability and machine-like co-ordination is also celebrated as "a way of life." Herein the iconicity of New Theatres is informed by certain elements basic to *bhadralok* life. Chief among these is "bhadrota," which may be interpreted as cultured gentility. Kanan Devi, a leading star of the 1930s and '40s who worked at New Theatres between 1936 and 1942, commented in her tribute to B. N. Sircar, founder-proprietor of New Theatres, "I was under contract with Radha films when I received the offer to play the role of Parvati in *Devdas*. I could not accept in spite of my enthusiasm for the offer. My regret was that I could not work with Mr Sircar. He had by then earned a very high reputation in the film industry as a noble, erudite and respectable filmmaker."⁴ In a similar vein, actress Umashashi Devi, who made a name for herself at New Theatres, reminisced in later life:

When I was at New Theatres, we used to compare ourselves with a happy family.... What a wonderful feeling of goodwill and happiness permeated the studio. We would enter the studio in the early hours of the morning and would not leave till our work was complete. Since discipline and adherence to principles regulated our lives, projects were always completed in time. What intimate bonds held us together.⁵

These constructions of respectability and extended family came together in the public face of New Theatres, producing a sense of the perfect. Herein, the imagination centering on New Theatres stands out as

unique when placed against, for instance, the "electrified utopias" of America studied by David Nye⁶, where electricity, as a symbol of technological progress, became a dominant icon in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

That the iconic status of New Theatres was entrenched by the 1950s is evident from the following extract from an essay in the souvenir brought out on the occasion of the silver jubilee of the Indian Talkie in 1956:

It was after that memorable film *Chandidas* was made when a Bengali Pioneer-Shri B N Sircar showed me one day around his New Theatres studio which has served for full 25 years not only Bengal but the whole of India as a veritable cradle of All India talents on a national cultural basis. The studio invested a fortune not in rewarding or capitalising on "Artistes" but in building up new traditions for the technique of artist acting, direction, photography, sound recording etc. It is because of these that this pioneer Bengal studio has become a veritable institution and a promoter of talents that have largely influenced the whole course of Indian Films. Bombay and Madras studios may have advanced further in some respects but the Bengal studio experts did the pioneering job on the technical side.⁷

This rhetoric has survived till to date, not only in reminiscences of an older generation, but in much of contemporary writing on the subject, and in popular discourse in the tele-visual media.⁸ In this essay, I probe the iconicity of New Theatres, exploring the hypothesis that its genesis, which I locate in the 1930s, was rooted in aspects of contemporary life that went much beyond the realm of cinema. The objective is to look deeper, and understand cinema as an institution rooted in the politics and economy of early twentieth century

Bengal/India. The final section of the essay aims to provide a brief insight into the lasting iconicity of New Theatres in contemporary India, where the concern has lingered as a shadow of its former self. However, before embarking on an understanding of this iconicity, I would like to chart the history of the institution, from foundation to dissolution, and subsequent revival.

The Story of New Theatres

Five minutes seven in the evening on Friday, the 28th November 1980. Destiny wrote finish to a history; history that wraps within it two covers, the actions, activities and events that resulted in the galvanisation of the art and industry of Indian cinema with its epicentre at Calcutta; a history that records, efforts, endeavours, enterprises and experiments behind the birth, growth and rise of the Indian cinema, and particularly the Bengali cinema to the peak of its glory, which in its ultimate analysis came to be reckoned as the 'Golden Age' of Bengali Cinema. For at this hour that evening-B N Sircar—the pioneering spirit of this galvanisation, the founder of New Theatres, the fountainhead of film culture in this country, the energising force behind all the experiments and innovations that gave a prestigious identity and image to Indian Cinema, breathed his last at his Elgin Road residence....⁹

Birendranath Sircar, founder-proprietor of New Theatres, sustained Bengal's leading film-producing concern for thirty-five years, 1931 to 1955. Sircar holds a record of film production in India, having produced 177 films under the New Theatres banner. The only other concern that came close to this figure was Chandulal Shah's Ranjit Movietone,¹⁰ with its 175 films.¹¹

At the start of the 1930s, a large share of Bengal's film industry was controlled by the Madans, Parsi businessmen originally from western India, who started out as financiers/exhibitors in the early years of the century. In 1919, Madan Theatres Ltd. produced *Bilvamangal*, the first Bengali feature. By the end of the twenties, the Madan Empire included half of all permanent cinemas in the subcontinent.¹² In 1935, there were about fourteen film producing concerns in Calcutta¹³. By 1938, these had increased to eighteen¹⁴, though a few of the older ones were no longer in existence. Clearly Birendranath Sircar had entered a competitive, but lucrative, field as is evident from depositions before the Indian Cinematograph Committee of 1927-28 confirming the popularity of the cinema among all classes in Bengal.¹⁵

In 1928-29, Birendranath formed International Film Craft in partnership with friends Amar Mallick and P N Ray, who had been associated with the making of Himanshu Rai's¹⁶ *A Throw of Dice* (1929). The concern

folded up after making two silent films *Chorkanta* and *Chasbar Meye*. In February 1931, Birendranath formed New Theatres as a family concern, shares being held exclusively by family members, with himself as managing director. In the same year, he opened New Theatres Studio in Tollygunge, in south Calcutta. Bharat Laxmi Pictures, Devdutta Films, East India Film Co., Kali Films and Radha Film Co. also had their own studios. Like other studios of the time, New Theatres contracted artistes as salaried employees, generally on the basis of monthly payment. The company had three fully equipped units, and boasted of some of the best technicians and music hands.

New Theatres' first success was *Chandidas* (1932), based on the life of the Vaishnava¹⁷ saint of the same name. It was remade as *Puran Bhakat* (1932) in Hindustani for the North Indian market, setting a trend of bilingual and multilingual features, and finally turning the tide for B N Sircar who had been struggling to find a distributor in Bombay, by then the established nerve center of the Indian cinema industry.

By 1934, New Theatres was a growing presence in parts of north, northwest and south India, as evident from the following report:

Mr B N Sircar with Mr I A Haffesji of New Theatres Ltd. left Calcutta on the 7th instant for an all-India inspection tour for better distribution of N T films and rearrangement of existing areas and circuits. The area covered in this tour is extensive and we were given to understand that very important arrangements have been made with local distributors regarding better and more methodical publicity and distribution of New Theatres pictures. It was found out in this tour, that distributors of Madras, Madura, Tricinpoly, Erode, Bangalore, Poona, Bombay, Cawnpore, Lucknow, Kangra Valley and Lahore are very very willing to take N T Films for their respective circuits. It is expected that this willingness on the part of provincial distributors will result in big business—which means big money for both the parties. *Puran Bhakat* and *Yehoodi-ki-Larki* have brought new ideas and new colours in the Indian filmdom.¹⁸

New Theatres' Bengali films also had a market in non-Bengali speaking areas, primarily on account their music, which contemporaries have cited as one of the principal strengths of New Theatres' films. Aurobindo Mukhopadhyay reminisces:

In my student days, we lived in Manihari village in the Katihar district of Bihar. Like boys and girls now sing Hindi film songs, Bihari boys and girls then sang the songs of *Chandidas*. After the evening's play, Bihari boys went home singing the song *Phire Chal Apan Ghare*. Many *ustads* from Bhagalpur would invariably sing the songs *Chunyeona bandhu* and *Shatek Baras Pare* at the end of each function. If they did not the Bihari

audience would send up requests for these.¹⁹

In a similar vein, Panna Rajji, who wrote the first Ph.D. thesis on Indian cinema, recalls, "I liked watching New Theatres' films but most of all I liked listening to the music that came out of New Theatres, even though I did not understand Bengali. I developed a taste in Rabindra sangeet through listening to the songs of Pankaj Mallick."²⁰ New Theatres popularised Rabindra sangeet, which had hitherto been confined to the hallowed precincts of Santiniketan.²¹

The largest market for New Theatres' films was, however, concentrated in the eastern India. At the beginning of 1940, New Theatres was a formidable presence in eastern and northeastern India, as revealed by a New Year's announcement of New Theatres' offerings for the coming week in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* titled "New Theatres Extends Through Their Distributors."²² Apart from Calcutta, New Theatres' films were showing in various mufassil towns and suburbs of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Assam and other regions of the northeast. In East Bengal, New Theatres' films were showing in Dacca, Mymensingh, Barishal, Kusthia, Tangail, Chittagong; in West Bengal in Sreerampore, Chinsura, Krishnanagar, Nabadwip, Sreepur, Sonarpur, Malda, Barrackpore, Ghatsila, Bankura, Uluberia, Andul, Kidderpore, Behala; in Bihar in Patna, Gaya, Muzaffarpur, Dhanbad, Katihar; Cuttack in Orissa; Dibrugarh, Nowgong, Imphal and Burma in the northeast. The year 1940 was, on the whole, a good one for New Theatres and saw the release of some of its most successful films: Phani Majumdar's *Dactar*, Pramathesh Barua's *Zindagi*, and Devaki Bose's *Nartaki*. But, 1940 was an apotheosis that signalled the swan song. At a time when New Theatres was at its peak, Pramathesh Barua, one of New Theatres' biggest stars, left, never to return. Barua's departure was an omen that heralded the beginning of the end.

New Theatres received its first serious setback with the onset of the Second World War. With the onset of war, the Government of India imposed a quota on the supply of raw film. During the initial months, producers were allotted only five reels a week, inflicting heavy losses on the studios, which had to maintain large establishments and salaried staff. At this time, B. N. Sircar's monthly expenditure on staff salaries alone amounted to about 40,000-45,000 rupees, a large sum by contemporary standards.²³ Later, however, the government appointed an ad-hoc committee that allotted quotas to producers on the basis of an average of films made till date. B. N. Sircar was granted a permit for the production of six films annually.²⁴

Sircar mentions the "excess profit"²⁵ tax as a subsequent setback, but the devastating blow came in the form of the communal riots of 1946 and the Partition of the country in 1947. All work remained

suspended during the period of communal turmoil and curfew between August 1946 and August 1947, and studio-owners sustained huge losses. Finally, with the partition of the country, the East Bengal (which became East Pakistan and subsequently Bangladesh) market for Bengali films was practically destroyed.

Bengali films from Calcutta had enjoyed a natural market in the east. Following Partition all commercial exchange between East and West Bengal came under international trade laws, which complicated the situation. At the same time, the new state of Pakistan imposed restrictive rules of trade on imports from India. According to Someshwar Bhowmik, prints of Bengali films from West Bengal sent to East Pakistan were returned after the imposition of an import tax!²⁶ As a result, producers and distributors became wary of sending out films to East Bengal, and the President of the Bengal Motion Picture Association in Calcutta made the following comment in the Silver Jubilee Souvenir of the Indian Talkie, "Even after their release, the pictures cannot be properly exploited because of the absence of adequate scope for their maximum exploitation. The East Bengali Market is now lost to Bengali films as a consequence of the Partition."²⁷ It may be mentioned here that the Bengali film industry was concentrated in West Bengal, in Calcutta. East Bengal had no organised film industry in the years before independence, the only known efforts at filmmaking being experimental ventures of members of the family by the Nawab of Dhaka.²⁸

The tumultuous events of 1946-47 seriously affected the film industry in Calcutta, particularly the bigger studios. By the beginning of the 1950s, the halcyon days of New Theatres were over. In the words of Dilip Kumar Sircar, B. N. Sircar's son, who joined the studio in 1951, "Our people had left for Bombay; finances were in disarray; There were court cases...my father had virtually closed shop."²⁹ In 1954, New Theatres ran into financial crisis following the liquidation of the Calcutta National Bank, creditor to New Theatres. In such a situation of crisis, the rights for the management of the New Theatres studios were handed over to Aurora Film Company in June 1954, on the basis of an arrangement that would allow the home concern to use the studio floors for its own productions ten days every month. For the rest of the time, the studios were to be hired out by Aurora. Aurora managed the studios till December 1954. From January 1955, management passed into the hands of industrialist Deepchand Kankaria's Delux Films.³⁰ In August 1956, a receiver was appointed by the Calcutta High Court to liquidate the dues of the Calcutta National Bank by a sale of the assets of New Theatres. In January 1956, New Theatres was closed down. However, Dilip Sircar, who, by this time, was working full time at New Theatres, arrived at an

agreement with the receiver and the New Theatres studios were re-opened in December 1957.³¹ On account of legal complexities, however, Dilip Sircar began producing films under the name of Sircar Productions, a banner he launched in 1955.³² In his words, “Those were the crucial years, 1957 to 61. It was a struggle just to keep the place alive.”³³ In the same interview he recalled, “At that time there was practically nothing left in the studio, neither camera nor recording equipment. Everything had to be hired. Naturally, after paying these rentals we were left with practically nothing.”³⁴ New Theatres scraped through the fifties by making a few films and by hiring out their studios. In 1961, Dilip Sircar amalgamated with India Film Laboratories, which, at the time, had on its board some of the biggest names of Indian/Bengali cinema—actress Kanan Devi, who had risen to prominence during her stint at New Theatres, Bengali superstar Uttam Kumar, and director Ajoy Kar.³⁵

New Theatres Limited went into liquidation in March 1962. India Film Laboratories managed the N T studios through the 1960s to the present day. Through the sixties to the eighties, Dilip Sircar made some films under various banners, such as, Sircar Productions, Sircar Productions Pvt. Ltd. and New Theatres Exhibitors Pvt. Ltd. It was following his efforts, since the mid-eighties, that New Theatres Limited was revived on 8th August 1991, when the liquidation was revoked by an order of the Calcutta High Court.³⁶ New Theatres Limited has since existed as a skeleton concern, their only production in these years being a five-episode commissioned serial for the National Network of *Doordarshan* titled “The Story of New Theatres.”³⁷

Inside Stories

New Theatres was a mammoth peopled by giants. Through the 1930s, and the early ‘40s, B. N. Sircar had the biggest names of Indian cinema on his payroll. Some, like K L Saigal, Jamuna Debi, Pahari Sanyal, and Leela Desai, were “discovered” by New Theatres; others, like Pramathesh Barua and Kanan Debi, Umashashi, Molina, and Chandrabati emerged as leading stars at New Theatres. A few like Durgadas Bandyopadhyay and Prithviraj Kapoor had, of course, already made a name on stage and screen before they joined Sircar. The list of stars at New Theatres also included directors Nitin Bose and Devaki Bose, sound recordist Mukul Bose, music directors Pankaj Mallick, Rai Chand Boral, and Timir Baran, and the blind singer K. C. Dey. The towering personality was B. N. Sircar himself. All available accounts have glorified him as the patriarch, the disciplinarian who held the institution in place.³⁸ Needless to say, it was a veritable galaxy, and clashes between the titans were inevitable.

Like any other producing concern of the time, New

Theatres had its share of fall-outs, peer rivalries, squabbles, and scandals. These have been glossed over in existing studies, or when brought up have generally been tinged with nostalgia, minimizing the elements of real life antagonism. The classic case is Pramathesh Barua’s fall-out with B. N. Sircar. Barua’s first film at New Theatres was *Rooplekha* (1934). The next year he made *Devdas*, with himself and K. L. Saigal in title roles in the Bengali and Hindi versions respectively. Barua, who had his own studio and producing house, had initially proposed a merger with New Theatres. Sircar, had, however, turned down the offer on the ground that their studios were located at fair distances, New Theatres in Tollygunge and Barua Studio in Ballygunge. In his opinion, the distance would obstruct the smooth functioning of any collaborative venture. But he offered Barua the option of joining New Theatres as director, which Barua eventually accepted, joining New Theatres as salaried artist.

Barua stayed with New Theatres through the 1930s, and directed some of its biggest successes, *Manjil* (1936), *Mukti* (1937), *Adhikar* (1938) and *Rajat Jayanti* (1939). His last film with New Theatres was *Zindagi* (1940). Following a disagreement with B. N. Sircar he left New Theatres, never to return. According to Subodh Mitra, editor at New Theatres, Barua was not being given as many films as were his peers Nitin Bose and Hemchandra Chunder.³⁹ That the rift was born out of deep differences is evident from Sircar’s following comment on Barua: “He was a remarkably innovative director who seemed to improve with every film. As an actor he forged a style that was uniquely his own. But as a man...well, I’d rather not discuss it.”⁴⁰ Curiously, this rift has been glossed over in existing studies of New Theatres, and what we have are tear-jerking accounts such as the following:

Pramathesh Barua, the director and actor who had played such a vital role in the successes of New Theatres, instructed as he lay dying that his body be taken past the house where Sircar lived. Remember that Barua had parted from Sircar many years before, which was inevitable given the singularities of the strict patriarch on the one hand and the talented but highly strung, freewheeling prince of an Eastern State on the other. This was done, and Sircar’s son Dilip remembers his sick father hobbling painfully to the window of his elegant Elgin road residence as the Prince of Players paused a while beneath it and then was carried away to his funeral. It was a poignant moment but more than that it was an act symbolic of a reference-point established a long time ago, in a business that was notorious for its callous and impermanent relationships.⁴¹

Director Nitin Bose, who left New Theatres during World War II, also reportedly had a falling-out with B.

N. Sircar over the latter's decision to remove studio equipment during the war without consulting Bose, who was head of the technical department at New Theatres. Sircar, however, denied any such charge, indicating instead that money matters were responsible for the split, "No, I didn't have any disagreement with him. I had three units. I transferred one of them because of the bombing—some lights, some of the cameras, sound craft and editing machine. Actually, he had wanted a sudden rise in remuneration which I had not been able to satisfy."⁴² Other accounts, however, refer to the rift, which supposedly happened during the shooting of *Kashinath* (1943), Nitin Bose's last film at New Theatres. According to Bagishwar Jha's account, in the course of the shooting Bose needed a "solar", and was surprised to find none in the studio, which had been built under his direct supervision and did not lack any necessary equipment. Later, he learned that B. N. Sircar had removed all valuable equipment to his countryside house in Shimultala for fear of their being destroyed in the bombing. Not getting a satisfactory explanation from Sircar as to why he had not been consulted before such a measure was taken, an aggrieved Nitin Bose reportedly told B. N. Sircar that henceforward he did not wish to be associated with New Theatres.⁴³

What is significant, however, is not whether it was Sircar's refusal to pay higher remuneration, or his unilateral decision to transfer equipment from the studio that led to the rift. Interesting is the manner in which accounts of alleged disputes have been glossed in sentimental rhetoric:

This shook Nitin Bose's confidence but in spite of it he continued attending the studio to complete the shooting vainly hoping,—“If only B N Sircar comes and speaks to him (sic) he (sic) will withdraw his words”. Perhaps B N Sircar had the same expectations,—“If only Nitin Bose comes and talks to him (sic), he (sic) will make amends.” But that was not to be. Completing the shooting of *Kashinath*, Nitin Bose left going to the studio. He did not even go to see the completed film; and he did not see *Kashinath* even after.”⁴⁴

Similarly Kanan Debi, leading female star at New Theatres, left the fold following differences with Sircar. It is believed that she was unhappy with her remuneration, which had not been raised despite her enormous success and immense popularity.⁴⁵ That this was the issue is suggested by director Modhu Bose's comment on New Theatres and Prabhat, the two leading concerns of the time, in the *Filmland Puja Special* of 1935, “These two producers in particular do not pay such fabulous salaries to their female artistes.”⁴⁶ Kanan Debi left New Theatres and joined Pramathesh Barua's M P Productions, which he had formed after leaving New Theatres. Asked about her departure, Kanan Debi

refused to divulge much: “It is not possible to comment on why I left New Theatres. But it was surely because there was a difference of opinion, and I came away on my own. That's my nature, if there is a difference of opinion I prefer to move away on my own.”⁴⁷ Instead, she preferred to comment on her emotional bond with New Theatres: “It was certainly a professional relationship, I worked for the money. But more than money, our relationship was characterized by sweetness. When I worked in the studio, it was like being in my own house. I felt I was working for myself. I never felt I was working for money.”⁴⁸ However, while at New Theatres, Kanan Debi had anything but an easy relationship with another leading actress, Sadhona Bose, grand-daughter of the famous Brahmo leader, Keshab Chandra Sen, who was known to belittle other actresses who did not boast of a privileged background like herself.⁴⁹

Like Kanan Debi, music director/actor Pankaj Mallick was disgruntled by the treatment at New Theatres, and briefly expresses his grievances in an autobiographical work, though immediately returning to a glossy rhetoric to disavow any subversive implications. He writes, “I received remuneration as music director, but was never offered anything for my services as playback singer and actor. Sometimes it would occur to me that the authorities might at least acknowledge my services, even if they did not remunerate them. But no, let all that be! New Theatres was my nurturing mother and let me come back to the pleasant memories...”⁵⁰ Mallick was also irked by the fact that he was considered subordinate to his colleague, music director Rai Chand Boral. Among other peer rivalries, the fall-out between Nitin Bose and Devaki Bose that came to a head during the shooting of *Mirabai* (1933) was so serious that it threatened to disrupt normalcy in the studio.⁵¹ Another standing issue at New Theatres was Saigal's alcohol problem. Radhanath, peon in the music department at New Theatres, when asked about Saigal, recounted, “He loved me. But his problem...it increased in Bombay. Then he came back and did *My Sister* and it was terrible...five shots where one was needed.”⁵² A similar scandal followed Umashashi Debi's elopement from the sets with one of the heirs of the Shova Bazar Palace.⁵³

From the above account it becomes obvious that New Theatres was hardly the well-oiled piece of smoothly functioning machinery or a large happy family “shelter[ed] from the contradictions of a nascent profession”⁵⁴ that established accounts/popular discourse have made it out to be. According to such accounts, New Theatres was the perfect organization till besieged by the external forces of war, communal turmoil, and finally the Partition.⁵⁵ This is not to suggest that their impact was any less devastating than has been construed by established literature, neither to be totally

skeptical of the sincerity of those who declared that they found a second home/refuge at New Theatres.⁵⁶ Rather, the intention of focusing on the underside of things is to emphasize the superficiality of the unproblematic narrative of existing historiography. This unproblematic narrative derives partly from a nationalist *cum* civility ('bhadrota') subtext, discussed in the following section. Most importantly, however, I would relate the iconicity of New Theatres to entrepreneurial success and commercial viability, and the associated sentiments of self-worth that were crucial to the Bengali bhadralok in those years that New Theatres was rising to prominence. This point will be substantiated below by locating New Theatres in the political and economic milieu of Bengal of the 1930s and '40s.

The Nationalist, Civility Subtext

Birendranath Sircar had started his career in the mid-1920s as a real estate developer in Calcutta, but could only manage to secure middle level contracts. In his words, "in those days this was the only option available to Indians in this field."⁵⁷ This was in spite of familial connections with the colonial administration. His father Sir N. N. Sircar had been the Advocate-General and member of the Viceroy's executive council. Birendranath recounts, "I had come back from the UK with a degree in civil engineering, but it was quite exasperating to take up only contract jobs. It was Haren Ghosh, the notable impresario, who convinced me that filmmaking held out better prospects."⁵⁸ The tone of resentment against prevailing conditions is unmistakable.

Given this backdrop, Birendranath's decision to take up filmmaking may be looked upon as an instance of indigenous assertion against conditions generated by colonialism. While the "better prospects" that Haren Ghosh promised were undoubtedly economic, there is room for the argument that such prospects also involved the lure of self-esteem and self-expression, not available in most spheres of public life. Already in the 1920s, the cinema was being looked upon as a realm of nationalist assertion, as evident from the following extract from a contemporary film journal which berated the makers of a recently released film on the ground that they had not bothered to append a Bengali nomenclature:

British Dominion Films Ltd.'s new feature, *Flames of Flesh*, was shown in Pearl Cinema. They haven't given the film a Bengali name. A film produced by a Bengali company should have been given a Bengali name. People have called the film *Kaamanar Agun*, *Lalashabanhi*, or anything that suited them, but there was no sign of any such name on the screen. Well, it is only natural that British Dominion will be loyal to the British dominion.⁵⁹

In a similar vein, an essay in another contemporary

journal, in its discussion of the educative potential of the cinema asserted, "But if the bioscope is used to popularise India's ancient civilization and its distinctiveness, it might not be too pleasing to the likes of Mayo and his ladies."⁶⁰ At the same time, there was a drive among the bhadralok to appropriate the new medium as their own, and a personality no less than Abanindranath Tagore⁶¹ greeted the talkie in the following words, assimilating it to Bengal's traditions of performance art:

Many are thinking that we got the talkie from the west. That is not true, the idea of the talkie was with us for a very long time. Take puppet shows, puppets danced and someone made sounds, sometimes spoke lines and sang songs to go with the movements....Then came jatra...it was like coloured pictures on a white screen....Then came the theatre with its scenarios. But soon people no longer wanted to hear other people talking, they wanted to make images speak....This is human nature, to go to one extreme then come back to the origins. That is what happens, man comes back to the beginnings, once again to shadow play.⁶²

Given the above milieu, it may be assumed that even a promotional tactic, with or without nationalist intention, would be enthusiastically construed as a nationalist endeavor, and it would not be an exaggeration to hold that New Theatres' nationalist credentials were in place even before the establishment of the concern.

In December 1930, B. N. Sircar inaugurated his first exhibition theatre, *Chitra*, in north Calcutta. Sircar had managed to convince the nationalist leader Subhas Chandra Bose, then Mayor of Calcutta Corporation, to be chief guest on the occasion, and the mob that had gathered to catch a glimpse of Bose had to be kept at bay by one Jabbar Mian and his men, professional "crowd handlers," who managed crowds at the football grounds in Calcutta. This episode has been much touted in later literature for its nationalist connotations.⁶³

At a later date nationalist sentiments were openly aired in *Chitra*, the New Theatres house magazine, lending credence to the hypothesis that apart from the obvious aspects of profit or the glamour of the medium, cinema was also alluring as space for self assertion, and a covert challenge of the West, and was seen as such by at least a section of the bhadralok. In the May-October, 1936 issue, *Chitra* carried an essay exhorting Indian producers to develop technical expertise to avoid dependence on imported technology from the West. It was declared that Indian cinema had started out as an imitation of Western techniques and methods of production, and had continued as such even though contemporary technicians had proved themselves as adept as their Western counterparts. The writer lamented that no encouragement/inducement had been offered to technicians to carry out

independent research which could make the Indian cinema industry “really self-supporting, healthy and progressive.”⁶⁴ Declaring that Indians would be “mere imitators and not creators” as long as they continued to work without coordinated effort, it was suggested that “our Producers should...get together and have some kind of collaborate Research Institute....For, until and unless we are prepared to face facts and organise our resources so as to make our technical body a creative force, there can never be any hope of this industry being acclaimed as anything but one built and dependent upon imitation of others.”⁶⁵ The writer concluded with the following plea for self-sufficiency:

Our suggestion for such co-operation will perhaps be considered too idealistic, in as much as our Producers are too suspicious of one another ever to pool their own resources even for their own benefit. In which event we would suggest that every producer should at least for his own benefit make it a point to include in his production expenses, on every picture that he makes, a certain sum of money which will be set apart expressly for research work...which may make our industry independent of outside assistance in the future and also impart to it a reputation which will be respected throughout the world.⁶⁶

This essay is reminiscent of the trend of *Atmasakti*, or self-sufficiency, propagated by Rabindranath Tagore during the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal.⁶⁷ New Theatres' 1938 hit, *Desher Mati* (The Motherland), had a story line that drew directly on the Tagorean ethic of self-sufficiency and self-help in agriculture⁶⁸ and was publicized as follows:

“THE MOTHERLAND”- Never to my knowledge has a bolder or more sincere effort been made in the history of the Indian screen to embody the ideals of *constructive and co-operative living, sane nationalism* (emphasis mine) and eloquent appeal to go back to the land of our forefathers as is being made by Nitin Bose in his latest venture, which he has titled the MOTHERLAND—aptly enough, the Bengali title literally translated means “our national soil.”⁶⁹

In fact, New Theatres' Tagore connection is a much told story in histories of Indian/Bengali cinema. Towards the end of 1931 Tagore had arrived in Calcutta with a Visva-Bharati drama troupe to put up a stage production of his musical opera *Natir Puja*. The overwhelming response to Tagore's dance drama inspired a decision at New Theatres to film *Natir Puja*. Upon Birendranath's request for a film version Tagore obliged, consenting to the filming of the stage presentation. For five days, a twenty-member New Theatres' crew, including Subodh Mitra, who became a well-known director in the 1940s, litterateur Premankur Atorthy, and ace technicians Nitin and Mukul Bose, worked with the Santiniketan team.⁷⁰ According to

Mitra, though the production carried Tagore's name as director, Tagore himself was present in the studio for a single day only when he recorded the speech delivered on his 70th birthday.⁷¹ Obviously, the project was expected to be a resounding success, as it had been decided that fifty percent of the film's proceeds would go into funding Tagore's Sriniketan⁷² project, and was vigorously publicized through the distribution of posters and handbills throughout Calcutta.⁷³ The 10,577-foot long cinematic version of *Natir Puja*, released on 22 March 1932, though a commercial failure, added significantly to the prestige of New Theatres, since contemporaries clearly identified the project as a Tagore handiwork. The Bengalee wrote:

Rabindranath has immortalized in poetry that sublime tragedy which the twilight of an autumn witnessed in a solitary corner of the king's garden at Magadha half a millennium before the birth of Christ. *Natir Puja* for that is the name of the film version of the poem performed by the students of Shantiniketan, started its run at Chitra on the 22nd, Vasanti Purnima day, the date of the birth of Lord Gautama.

As everyone knows, apart from the charm lent to it by the Poet, the story has an intense appeal of its own. And considering the fact that the artistes were all amateurs in their teens, it may be said without hesitation that the charm has not suffered and the interest of the play has been maintained throughout. The songs, under the direction of Mr Dinendra Nath Tagore, have been well sung and are sure to be appreciated by all, especially the swan song of the dancing girl.

But the most striking feature of the film is the interpretative dance of the artiste who played the role of Srimati. To Rabindranath belongs the credit for revival of this ancient Indian art and its inclusion in this film must give an opportunity to many who have not seen it danced by the poet and his pupils during the seasonal festivals he is in the habit of celebrating in Calcutta to see and admire these dances.⁷⁴

In fact, B. N. Sircar, though attributing the commercial failure of *Natir Puja* to the short shooting schedule,⁷⁵ cited the project as a memorable episode in the history of New Theatres, making obvious the significance attached to this association with Bengal's leading light.⁷⁶ A thatched, open-air enclosure being used for the film *Shakuntala*, then under production, was removed from the sets and erected elsewhere for Tagore's repose. The *Gol Ghar*, as this structure came to be called, was never dismantled, and has been a focus for nostalgic wallowing in later years.⁷⁷

The prestige/respectability attained by New Theatres through the Tagore connection was buttressed by B. N. Sircar's own reputation as a gentleman. In 1932, in a

contemporary film journal, a letter to the editor carrying the heading “A Very Reasonable Man” contained the following appraisal of B. N. Sircar:

Referring to your comments in the leading article of your issue dated 24th instant regarding unfair treatment meted to the Bombay productions by Local Exhibitors, who are Producers also, I presume this refers to New Theatres Ltd.

I am also an Agent of one of the leading Bombay producers and I had the same impression in the beginning but on approaching Mr B N Sircar personally I find that I was mistaken and that he is a very reasonable man and always fair and gives Justice wherever it is due. To prove this I will quote the following example, which is self explanatory.

My picture “Saubhagya Sundari” is having a run at present in New Cinema and Mr Sircar has given me better terms than what his own production “Puran Bhagat” enjoyed. To be more explicit “Puran Bhagat” was discontinued for further weeks when a gross taking amounted to a certain figure while “Saubhagya Sundari” will continue to run for further weeks even if the income is a couple of hundred rupees less than that certain figure of “Puran Bhagat”. This proves the justice given by Mr Sircar to Bombay productions.⁷⁸

That New Theatres was identified with bhadrakol Bengal becomes further evident from the following description of B. N. Sircar in the *Indian Cinematograph Year Book* of 1938, “He is the Gentleman of the industry—his personality is at once inspiring and pleasing. Culture is written all over him.”⁷⁹

The nationalist/respectability subtext has been an important element in the larger imagination centering on New Theatres. It is my understanding, however, that the most decisive element which made New Theatres an icon of bhadrakol Bengali was, as mentioned earlier, its success as a commercial concern. The next section of this paper locates the birth of iconicity in the triumphs of a bhadrakol enterprise at a time that may be characterized as one of general dystopia for the bhadrakol.

Rising Fortunes Amidst Dystopia

The 1930s were a period of great flux in the political economy of Bengal. Bengal, which had been the center stage of Indian politics till the mid-1920s, saw itself being marginalized vis-à-vis the national movement, with the central Congress leadership displaying a growing apathy towards the bhadrakol who dominated the Bengal Congress.⁸⁰ In his two-volume autobiographical work published at the beginning of the thirties, the noted scientist, Prafulla Chandra Ray, noted, “The Bengali is now awakening to the fact that his

leaders are very old men, that no one is taking their place, and that whether in Delhi or inside the Congress his representatives have little influence. The political centre of gravity is shifting northwards and westwards.”⁸¹ Marginalization in national politics was accompanied by a minimization of the bhadrakol’s regional hegemony, an outcome of what Joya Chatterji has called “the emergence of the mufassil in Bengal politics.”⁸² Chatterji shows how the metropolis, which had dominated Bengal politics till the end of the 1920s, increasingly became less significant from the early thirties, as political fortunes began to be determined by the Muslim vote concentrated in rural- and small-town Bengal.⁸³ This transformation, a direct outcome of the Communal Award of 1932 and Government of India Act of 1935, which enlarged Muslim representation in the provincial assemblies at the expense of the Hindu vote, culminated in the accession of the Krishak Praja Party⁸⁴-Muslim League ministry in Bengal in 1937. The ministry soon set in motion a series of reforms that seriously affected the Hindu *bhadrakol*. As Joya Chatterji enumerates:

In 1938, the Fazlul Haq ministry changed the rules about police recruitment so that “while enlisting Bengali constables the Superintendent of Police must see that not less than 50% of the recruits are Muslims”. In the same year, the ministry passed legislation that stipulated that 60 per cent of all Government appointments be reserved for Muslims. In 1939, the Government instructed local bodies “not to propose for appointment to local bodies persons who were known to be actively opposed to the policy of the Ministry”, and slapped administrative controls on nominations to the Union Boards, which accounted for one-third of their total membership.⁸⁵

Rajat Kanta Ray, in his discussion of the end of Congress rule in the Calcutta Corporation,⁸⁶ a bhadrakol bastion since 1924, notes that the shift in the balance of forces in the arena of municipal politics was clearly manifested soon after the new ministry came into power, in the new favorable position of the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation vis-à-vis the Calcutta Corporation. From the beginning of the thirties, the Congress had been pressing for a take-over of the Electric Supply Corporation arguing that it would reduce the total cost of consumption per year, a proposal repeatedly rejected by the government. The new Muslim ministry, which was backed by European big business interests, rejected the take-over proposal in the legislature, even amidst scathing criticism from Congressmen. Thereafter, in 1939, the Calcutta Municipal Amendment Act formally put an end to Congress supremacy in the Calcutta Corporation. The next year, the Ministry introduced the Secondary Education Bill, which wrested control of higher

education in the province away from Calcutta University and vested it in a Secondary Education Board in which Muslims were to be given a greater say. As Chatterji puts it, "Higher education was not only a mainstay of bhadralok power and influence; it was also a symbol of their exclusive identity. In threatening their control over this vital asset, the Bill also challenged the very basis of their 'cultural superiority'..."⁸⁷ Like higher education, administrative and political appointments had been bhadralok preserves, and this challenge in a hitherto uncontested public sphere greatly unsettled them.⁸⁸ The blow was all the more severely felt as bhadralok incomes from land had fallen drastically during the Depression, the crisis being compounded by the enactment of anti-zamindar legislation by the Haq ministry.⁸⁹

In other ways too, the 1930s were the beginning of a trying time for the bhadralok. In the period 1931 to 1950, Bengal saw an enormous increase in population resulting from increased migration into the province. According to Nilanjana Chatterjee, this transformed Calcutta from a "city of migrants to a city of refugees,"⁹⁰ and brought Calcutta face to face with urban problems brewing for a long time. The influx of refugees coincided with a shift of economic power in the region from Bengali entrepreneurs to the Marwaris, a business community of Western India who migrated to Bengal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This process may be dated to the First World War and was consolidated in the thirties. Thus, Prafulla Chandra Ray lamented the economic conquest of Bengal by non-Bengalis, chiefly the Marwaris and Gujratis, and to a lesser degree the Punjabis,⁹¹ noting that businessmen from western India had been able to influence government policy through the capture of such bodies as the Federated Chamber of Commerce.⁹² Commenting on the commercial milieu of late colonial Bengal, Jawaharlal Nehru, the future Prime Minister of India, observed, "Calcutta has been and continues to be the chief centre of British capital and industry, and the English and the Scotch dominate business there; but they are being caught up by the Marwaris and Gujratis. Even petty trades in Calcutta are most often in non-Bengali hands."⁹³ Though John Broomfield has argued that the relative absence of Bengali capital in Calcutta should be viewed as an indication that Bengalis were responding to new opportunities in the hinterland,⁹⁴ the fact remains that Bengali entrepreneurship was now a thin presence in the economic/commercial nerve center of eastern India.

Omkar Goswami has shown that the rise of Marwari enterprise was accompanied by the fall of a small group of Bengali bhadralok from earlier positions of affluence.⁹⁵ These entrepreneurs had, since the days of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, raised slogans of economic nationalism and were instrumental in

launching ventures that produced pharmaceuticals, vaccines, soap and cosmetics.⁹⁶ These firms, which had prospered for a while, lost their vitality and petered out from the city's economic landscape by the 1940s.

Seeing Cinema with New Eyes?

Broadly speaking, therefore, the Bengali bhadralok was undoubtedly at the receiving end of things, though, of course, the extent to which they were affected remains debatable. It is my understanding, however, that a degree of closer competition in the established spheres of public life, such as politics and government jobs, led the bhadralok to better appreciate opportunities thrown up by newer, relatively unexplored avenues like the cinema. Dhiraj Bhattacharya, who started his career as actor in 1929,⁹⁷ with Madan Theatres' *Giribala*, describes in his autobiography the following interaction with his uncle, clerk in a merchant office:

Suddenly, Uncle asked, "How much are they giving you each month?" Fanning the flames of envy, I exaggerated somewhat—"One fifty now, it'll become five hundred once *Kalparinay* releases. Eyes wide open uncle gasped, "Five Hundred?" Nonchalantly I replied, "O yes, what's great about this. The way cinema is becoming popular by the day, it'll be easy to earn thousand a month in a year's time". Dumbstruck Uncle stared out of the window....Still staring out, he said dully, "What are you saying? People with BA, MA degrees consider themselves fortunate if they can earn hundred a month. And you people will earn that much by just colouring your face and cavorting with those females?" Clearly I had destroyed Uncle's peace for some time to come.⁹⁸

The above interaction indicates that cinema was opening up to the imagination of middle-class Bengalis. Further, it may be surmised that though having to compete with the Marwaris, who, by the 1930s, were a formidable presence in the film industry,⁹⁹ the limited nature of Muslim involvement in Bengal's cinema industry made it a relatively safe investment for the bhadralok.¹⁰⁰

The involvement in alternate avenues of public life was not confined to the cinema; this was also true of bhadralok investment in a mass sport like soccer in the 1930s.¹⁰¹ In fact, bhadralok initiative in such spheres often overlapped, as in the case of Birendranath Sircar or Sir Manmatha Nath Ray Chowdhury, the Raja of Santosh. Both men were prominent figures in Calcutta's elite circles in the 1930s. In 1932-33, Santosh and Sircar were President and Treasurer, respectively, of the Indian Football Association, the apex soccer association in India.¹⁰² At the same time, the Raja also dabbled in cinema. The *Filmland Puja Special* of 1935 carried an essay by the Maharaja, in which he extolled the medium as representative of a new age: "If the present age indicates anything it indicates motion.... The old modes

of entertainments suggest static condition and that is why they are going out of existence. Cinema indicates motion. In a whirlpool of action, the total world is epitomised; its total knowledge is codified.¹⁰³ For educated Bengalis like the Raja, therefore, cinema was also significant because it epitomized technological progress, and could be identified as representative of the “present,” or the modern age.

From the above, it may reasonably be deduced that in the 1930s the cinema was increasingly opening up as a field of interest among the bhadralok. The intense investment in the medium by at least a section of the bhadralok may be assessed from film reviews in contemporary journals which express a degree of cultural snobbery, a trait particularly noticeable around this time in the bhadralok’s conduct in public life. Joya Chatterji has shown that the bhadralok reaction against the Communal Award of 1932 was founded on assumptions of cultural superiority vis-à-vis the Muslims.¹⁰⁴ The same mood of superiority/snobbery characterizes bhadralok assessment of contemporary cinema, as evidenced in the film journal *Bioscope*’s scathing review of a newly released film:

Leave alone the generation of finer sentiments, even the proper depiction of a story has eluded us. Lighting leaves on a small iron stove in the forest Indira prepared fifty different kinds of dishes, being a Hindu woman pulled her sari over her head with soiled hands at least twenty-five times, wiped her hands on herself, began walking having somehow wrapping around her knees the sari the village priest had given her; these are the minor points—had the director’s vision been a little sharper he could have corrected these deficiencies, but beyond external vision there is an inner, inborn vision which all these people seem to lack. That is the deficiency of finer sentiments.¹⁰⁵

Taking a cue from the above observation, there is room for the argument that the same intense involvement in the medium produced sentiments of self-worth in the triumphant moments of bhadralok enterprise.

A Triumphant New Theatres

In the wake of the success of *Manzil* (1936) the New Theatres mouthpiece declared, “As I predicted, *Manzil* the Hindustani version of *Gribadaba*, has been declared another all India triumph for New Theatres. With the release of this latest opus of Pramathes Barua, the stock of ‘Jumbo’ (the Elephant) has risen yet another score of points to a new high—as they say in the Stock Exchange at New York!”¹⁰⁶ The jubilation in the above declaration is telling. New Theatres’ strategy of double versions was bearing fruit at a time when it was increasingly being realized that it was imperative for Bengal’s film industry to move beyond Bengal if it was to sustain commercial

viability, and there were calls for more undertakings in the direction of multi-lingual features. An article in the *Filmland Puja Special* of 1935 had made the following case in favor of diversification:

The language is a great draw-back. A Bengali Talkie is a commodity which has a demand only in Bengal, Assam and in certain cities of Northern India where a considerable number of Bengali immigrants reside...if the Bengali studios go on manufacturing Bengali Films only, it will be hardly possible for them to keep themselves going on businesslike lines. Though Kali Films have been one of the pioneers in producing Bengali Talkies, they have produced a few Tamil-Telegu pictures as well as one Hindi-Urdu film “Amina”, in addition to their Bengali Productions. Radha Films’ “Manmoyee Girls School” has no doubt captured the Bengali public but the studio could not possibly flourish on production of this nature alone.¹⁰⁷

According to Pradip Krishen, it was the practice of making films in double version that had projected Bengali filmmakers like Devaki Bose to all-India standing.¹⁰⁸ Contemporary accounts testify that New Theatres was better organized and financially more stable than most concerns in Bengal, one of the few that could successfully compete with Bombay; one such account cited below clearly celebrates New Theatres as an exception to the rule:

Bombay studios know the marketing of the films all over India, much better than the Calcutta studios. Excepting the New Theatres, whose publicity organisation is much more perfect than any other studio of India, all other Calcutta studios suffer very seriously from improper publicity organisation and the exploitation side of the films is practically at nil compared to the Bombay studios.¹⁰⁹

By the mid-thirties, New Theatres was being named one of the top studios in the country: “The major producers (who) number about 20....Amongst these major concerns Ranjit, Prabhat and New Theatres Ltd. are the leaders. The direction of progress depends upon them.”¹¹⁰ According to Baburao Patel, editor of *Filmindia*, a leading contemporary film magazine, “The best were the movies produced by B N Sircar. Santaram’s were slightly crude but B N Sircar’s films were very fine.... B N Sircar’s ‘Vidyapati’, ‘Manzil’ were great films. He had these great people—P C Barua, Debaki Bose, particularly, and Nitin Bose.... Bombay Talkies films were quite good—not great. Not on par with the films of New Theatres.”¹¹¹ Such assertions assume significance when inserted into the political and economic milieu of late-colonial Bengal. As discussed above, Bengal was beginning to lose its earlier prominence in national politics, and the Bengali bhadralok were witnessing a waning of prospects in the

wake of marginalization in regional politics and economy. It is my understanding that New Theatres, a leading concern that was clearly identified as “bhadraklok,” was on its way to acquiring an iconic status by the middle of the 1930s because it expanded and flourished at a time when, generally speaking, the bhadraklok’s fortunes were on the ebb.

By the latter half of the thirties, New Theatres was clearly anxious to negate all regional connotations. As publicity for the Hindi version of New Theatres’ great hit *Mukti*, released in northern India in December 1937, the house magazine wrote:

Those who have been fortunate enough to have seen the Bengali Version of *Mukti*, which was released three months ago, will have had their appetites whetted for the release of the Hindi Version of this superb creation of Pramathes Barua. It is not necessary to understand the Bengali language to see this great picture. So simple has been the treatment, so delicate the touch on the artistes, so subtle the psychological reflexes, that the picture unfolds itself and you do not need to understand language at all, but you know the poignancy of the story that is unfolded before your eyes.¹¹²

In a similar vein, a poster in the same issue declared that *Mukti*, which still awaited release at some centers had already “created a NEW RECORD at DELHI.”¹¹³ Evidently, the desire was to project a trans-regional/“national persona,” and strikingly contrasts publicity statements of the early 1920s. In 1922, the Indo-British Film Co. advertised its maiden feature in the following words, “The first feature film played completely by Bengali actors. Feature film made by Bengalis under Bengali supervision, with no foreign assistance at all—*The England Returned*—Complete in six reels. An all-star production. Bengali music, Bengali titles.”¹¹⁴ Nationalist sentiments are evident in the language of publicity, so also unabashed provincialism, and such provincialism is rampant in contemporary writings on the cinema.¹¹⁵

Up until the 1920s, when Bengal was a key player in national politics and the Bengali bhadraklok remained dominant in the regional politics and economy, provincialism was a cherished idiom. With the growing marginalization of Bengal in national politics, and the relative decline of bhadraklok dominance following Muslim political ascendancy in the province, much of earlier investment in a regional identity seems to have fizzled out, getting channelled into trans-regional or “national” aspiration, as is revealed in the changing language of film publicity. In her analysis of bhadraklok politics in late-colonial Bengal, Joya Chatterji makes the case that “the politics of the bhadraklok increasingly turned inwards, concerned to counter the threat to their position in Bengal.”¹¹⁶ The above study, however, suggests that the

turning inwards of politics was paralleled by a broadening of horizons in the cultural sphere.

New Theatres Survives

The exaltation of the dead “elephant”¹¹⁷ has been pervasive in contemporary Indian popular media, more specifically in West Bengal. As concluding comments to this paper, I would like to offer an insight into the enduring iconicity of New Theatres, viewing nostalgia against the backdrop of a failing Bengali film industry.

On his death, on 28 November 1980, an obituary to B. N. Sircar in a leading Calcutta daily informed, “New Theatres (also) made films in Hindi to cater to a wider market—a practice that is being advocated to tackle the current problems of the film industry.”¹¹⁸ Economic crisis has been a recurrent note in the Bengali film industry since the end of the 1960s. Speaking of the crisis of Bengali cinema, Kironmoy Raha observes, “When by the late sixties one indifferent film after another failed at the box office, Bengali commercial cinema did not know where to look for remedies.”¹¹⁹ The industry had been riding on the shoulders of a star system that also began failing in the 1970s, when even reigning matinee idols Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen failed to deliver the goods.¹²⁰ At the same time, from the 1970s the commercially viable Bombay/Hindi cinema became a closer reference and mainstream Bengali cinema began incorporating the “masala”¹²¹ elements of Hindi cinema, like fight sequences and archetypal villains, to somehow produce a more saleable package. *Amanush* (1974) and *Ananda Asbram* (1977), two of the most successful Bengali films of the late seventies, both featuring Uttam Kumar, Bengali cinema’s greatest star since the mid-fifties, blended the Bombay formula with the Bengal landscape. *Amanush* was simultaneously made in Bengali and Hindi, and won Uttam the *Filmfare*¹²² Best Actor award and Bombay based Bengali producer/director Sakti Samanta the Best Producer at the regional awards function held in Calcutta in 1976.¹²³

However, *Amanush* and *Ananda Asbram* were exceptions and most of Uttam’s later films lost out at the box office. Raha comments, “Only when a producer from Bombay, Sakti Samanta, came with his resources and experience...people thronged the theatres,... But the very success of these two films showed up the deficiencies when producers here tried out anything on their own.”¹²⁴ Though a new “formula,”¹²⁵ inaugurated by Anjan Chowdhury’s *Shatru* (1984) brought audiences back to the theatres in the mid-eighties, mainstream Bengali cinema had largely lost out on its mainstay, the Bengali bhadraklok. Mainstream Bengali cinema now came to be characterized by a move beyond the metropolis of Calcutta in search of subjects and core audiences.

The Bengali film industry remained bogged down by

economic crisis through much of the 1980s and '90s. Through this period, mainstream Bengali cinema, by and large, came to be characterized by a mufassil and/or folk ethos. The Bengali cinema that had been characterized "middle class"¹²⁶ (read bhadraklok) was no longer the bhadraklok's. Viewed against the above backdrop, one begins to comprehend the nostalgic tone of contemporary (post-1980) discourse on New Theatres, that gloats over a golden era of Bengali cinema when the perfect marriage of economics and "respectability" ruled the roost.

NOTES

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²Brochure published on the occasion of a screening of selected New Theatres films under *National Film Heritage*, a collaborative program of the Centre for Development of Instructional Technology and the National Film Archive of India, 18-23 February (1985) (New Delhi: Centre for Development of Instructional Technology for India International Centre, 1985).

³*Bhadraklok* is a generic term used widely in Bengal to refer to an educated, though not always affluent, middle and upper stratum of society.

The historical data provided by scholars like S. N. Mukherjee and John McGuire provide room for the argument that the category *bhadraklok* refers to both a class of aristocratic Bengali Hindus, and those of more humble origin. While some of them had made their fortunes through service to the Mughals, most of them "rose from poverty to wealth" in businesses and occupations as varied as shipping, indigo plantations, *banyans* to the British, purchasing *zamindaris*, and flour mills. Below this group were the large shopkeepers, small landholders and white-collar workers in commercial and government houses, teachers, "native doctors," journalists, and writers. This group was referred to as the *madhyabit* in early nineteenth-century Calcutta. S. N. Mukherjee, *Calcutta: Essays in Urban History* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1993); John McGuire, *The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadraklok in Calcutta, 1875- 1885*, Australian National University Monographs on South Asia, no. 10 (1983).

⁴Kanan Debi's tribute to B. N. Sircar on the occasion of the release of New Theatres' hundredth film. For details see; Bagiswar Jha, *B N Sircar: A Monograph* (Calcutta: The National Film Archive of India, Pune in association with Seagull Books, 1990), 53.

⁵Umashashi Debi's tribute to B. N. Sircar. For details see; Jha, *B N Sircar: A Monograph*, 55.

⁶David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1990), 29-84, 339-377.

⁷Dr Kalidas Nag, "Bengal's Cultural Contribution to the

Screen," in *Indian Talkie 1931-56: Silver Jubilee Souvenir* (Bombay: Film Federation of India, 1956), 13.

⁸See; Gourangaprasad Ghosh, *Sonar Daag* (Calcutta: Jogomaya Prakashani, 1982), 141-143; Jha, *B N Sircar*, 3-25; Robi Basu, "Talkie'r Swarnajug Ebong Chalachhitre Uttaran," *Anandalok*, 31 March (1990); Ashoke Sen, "Remembering New Theatres," *The Telegraph*, 15 March (1991); *The Renaissance Man of Indian Cinema*, *B N Sircar*, a documentary film on B. N. Sircar, on Doordarshan, 9 July (2000); Telecast of coverage of B. N. Sircar's Centenary Celebrations, on ETV, 17 September (2001); *Katbae Katbae*, a live program on New Theatres and B. N. Sircar, on Doordarshan Calcutta, 30 October (2002).

⁹*Cine Advance*, 5 December (1980).

¹⁰Along with Bombay Talkies, New Theatres and The Prabhat Film Company, Chandulal Shah's Ranjit Movietone was one of the great institutions of the studio era. Ranjit had on its payroll stars like Gohar, E Billimoria, Madhuri, Motilal, Khurshid and K L Saigal.

¹¹*Cine Advance*, 5 December (1980).

¹²Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemsen (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* (New Delhi: OUP, 1999), 130.

¹³For details see; "4th Feb 1931 to 31st Dec 1934: what happened—and what will happen," *Editorial, Moving Picture Monthly*, Annual Issue (1935); reproduced in Samik Bandyopadhyay (ed.), *Indian Cinema: Contemporary Perceptions from the Thirties, A Celluloid Chapter Documentation* (Jamshedpur: Celluloid Chapter, 1993), 20.

¹⁴These were Aurora Film Corporation, Shree Bharat Laxmi Pictures, Chitramandir R B S Productions, Dev-Dutta Films, East India Film Co., Indra Movietone, Kali Films, Kamala Talkies, Madan Theatres Ltd., Motimahal Theatres Ltd., Murlil Pictures, New Theatres Ltd., New Popular Pictures, The Quality Pictures, Radha Film Co., Sonoray Pictures Syndicate, Star Film Co, Sunrise Film Co. and Tollywood Studio; B. D. Bharucha (ed.), *The Indian Cinematograph Year Book* (Bombay: The Motion Picture Society of India, 1938), 284-285.

¹⁵"About 600 people go to the cinemas. And in the case of a good film, the attendance of the audience increases very high and the hall is filled to its utmost capacity. Even many people cannot get themselves accommodation." Written statement of Mr. Sushil Kumar Dutt, Calcutta, dated 20 December 1927; "Since January, 1925, I have lived in Calcutta as Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Children in India,...In Calcutta, Indians of both educated and illiterate classes, frequent cinemas in large number. The cheap seats always seem full." Written statement of Miss Margaret G. Arbuthnot, Secretary, Society for the Protection of Children in India, dated 1 December 1927; *Indian Cinematograph Committee 1927-28, Evidence*, Vol. III, OIOC V/26/970/4.

¹⁶Actor/filmmaker; in 1934 founded Bombay Talkies, the best equipped studio of the country in the 1930s and 1940s.

¹⁷Popular religious cult in Bengal.

¹⁸"Notes and News," in *Varieties Weekly*, March (1934).

¹⁹Arabindo Mukhopadhyay, "Shastri Debaki Kumar," in *100 Years of Debaki Kumar Bose* (Calcutta: Eastern India Motion Picture Association, 1999).

²⁰Interview with Panna Raiji (Shah), 7 July (2002). Her thesis was published as *The Indian Film* (Bombay: The Motion

Picture Society of India, 1950). One of Bengal's greatest music directors, Pankaj Mallick started his film career at New Theatres.

²¹Small university town in West Bengal. When Rabindranath Tagore began his experimental, open-air classes in the region in 1901, he named it Shantiniketan or the Abode of Peace. Tagore lived and worked here, and founded the Visva-Bharati, a liberal arts university.

²²*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 1 January (1940).

²³*Chitravas* Vols. 2&3 (14), 101.

²⁴*Chitravas* Vols. 2&3 (14), 101.

²⁵*Chitravas* Vols. 2&3 (14), 101.

²⁶Someshwar Bhowmik, *Bharatiya Chalacchitra: Ekti Arthanaitik Pratibedan* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1996), 136.

²⁷M. D. Chatterjee, "Rising costs and crushing taxes," in *Indian Talkie 1931-56: Silver Jubilee Souvenir* (Bombay: Film Federation of India, 1956), 29.

²⁸For details see; Anupam Hayat, *Bangladesher Chalacchiturer Itibhas* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Chalacchitra Unnayan Corporation, 1987), 9-12.

²⁹*The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 20 November (1983), 28.

³⁰*Jugantar*, 26 July (1984).

³¹*Jugantar*, 26 July (1984).

³²Interview with Dilip Sircar, Calcutta, 18 August (2002).

³³*The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 20 November (1983), 28.

³⁴*Jugantar*, 26 July (1984).

³⁵*The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 20 November (1983), p.28.

³⁶Interview with Dilip Sircar, Calcutta, 18 August (2002).

³⁷Till date, the only feature on a filmmaking concern commissioned by the Government of India.

³⁸Jha, *B N Sircar: A Monograph*, 3-25; Arundhati Ray, "The Drama of New Theatres, all over again," in *The Telegraph*, 11 February (1995).

³⁹*Chitravas*, Vol 28, Nos. 3 & 4 and Vol. 29, Nos. 1 & 2, 30.

⁴⁰Interview with B. N. Sircar, Dilip Sircar Collection.

⁴¹Jha, *B N Sircar*, 4.

⁴²*Chitravas*, Vols. 2&3 (14), 102-103.

⁴³Bagishwar Jha, *Nitin Bose: Flowering of a Humanist Filmmaker* (Calcutta: Asian Film Foundation, 1986), 16-25.

⁴⁴Jha, *Nitin Bose: Flowering of a Humanist Filmmaker*, 25.

⁴⁵Subhra and Jayabrato Chatterjee, "The New Theatres of Bengal: The dream merchants created reality from their dreams. Tread softly now for they are only dreams," *The India Magazine*, November (1932), 60.

⁴⁶Modhu Bose, "The Production Parade," *Filmland Puja Special* (Bombay: 1935), 18.

⁴⁷*Jugantar*, 26 July (1984).

⁴⁸*Jugantar*, 26 July (1984).

⁴⁹Subhra and Jayabrato Chatterjee, "The New Theatres of Bengal," 60.

⁵⁰Pankaj Mallick, *Amar Jug Amar Gaan* (Calcutta: Firma K.L.M Pvt. Ltd, 1980), 97.

⁵¹Nirmal Dhar, "New Theatres: Kichu Smriti Koekti Dwirghashash," Dilip Sircar Collection.

⁵²"All This Belongs To Me," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 20 November (1983), 31.

⁵³Subhra and Jayabrato Chatterjee, "The New Theatres of

Bengal," 60.

⁵⁴Jha, *B N Sircar*, 4.

⁵⁵Jha, *B N Sircar*, 7-8; Arundhati Ray, "The Drama of New Theatres, All Over Again".

⁵⁶*Jugantar*, 26 July (1984); Jha, *B N Sircar*, Tributes to New Theatres, 53-57.

⁵⁷*Chitravas*, Vols. 2&3 (14), 99.

⁵⁸Dilip Sircar's personal collection.

⁵⁹*Bioscope*, Vol. 18, no. 8 March, B.S. 1330 (1923).

⁶⁰Nalini Ray, "Bharate Chalacchitra," *Probashi* (1337), reproduced in Debiprasad Ghosh ed., *Bangla Bhashae Chalacchitra Charcha, 1923-33*, (Calcutta: Cine Club of Calcutta, 1990), 66; Lord Mayo was the British Viceroy of India, murdered at Port Blair on February 8, 1872. Here "Mayo" is generically used to refer to the colonial administration.

⁶¹Regarded as the father of India's modern art. Born on 7 August 1871, at Jorasanko, the family residence of the Tagores in Calcutta, Abanindranath was the nephew of Rabindranath Tagore.

⁶²Abanindranath Tagore's address at the inauguration of Bengal's first known cinema library on 29 April 1931, reproduced in Ghosh, (ed.), *Bangla Bhashae Chalacchitra Charcha, 1923-33*, 60.

⁶³Subhas Chandra Bose, in his inaugural speech, urged the conscious promotion and development of Indian language films, particularly Bengali films, and it was to honor Bose that *Chitra's* entrance tickets came to be printed in Bengali, a departure from contemporary practice. Ghosh, *Sonar Daag*, 142.

⁶⁴*Chitra*, Vol. 2, No. 2, May-Oct (1936), 1-3.

⁶⁵*Chitra*, Vol. 2., No. 2. May-Oct (1936), 1-3.

⁶⁶*Chitra*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Vol. 2. No. 2. May-Oct (1936), pp. 1-3.

⁶⁷The Swadeshi Movement was an anti-colonial resistance movement against the Partition of Bengal, 1905-8. The movement has often been seen as the initial coming together and subsequent parting of ways of Indian nationalists. Sumit Sarkar has identified four strands within the Swadeshi Movement. One strand included the old moderates Surendranath Bannerjee and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who believed in constitutional methods but were deeply offended by Curzon's aggressive measures. The second was represented by leaders of society who until 1905 had called for a process of self strengthening or *Atmasakti*; Rabindranath Tagore is the best example of this legion. The third was a new generation of assertive leaders who propounded passive resistance and boycott and also violence if repression became intolerable. Among the main votaries of this form were Lala Lajpat Rai, Tilak, and Aurobindo Ghosh. Finally, there were small bands of angry young men who took to the cult of the bomb, believing revolutionary terror to be the only language the colonialists would understand.

⁶⁸For the storyline of *Desher Mati/Dharti Mata* see Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 236.

⁶⁹*Chitra*, December (1937).

⁷⁰Ashoke Nag, "The Reel Tagore," *The Telegraph Magazine*, (18 March 1990), 10.

⁷¹*Chitravas*, (Special Issue), Vol 28, No. 3 & 4 and Vol. 29,

No. 1 & 2 (July '93-June '94), 32.

⁷²One half of the twin campus of Visva-Bharati, Sriniketan, three kilometers distant from Santiniketan, is made up of a cluster of institutes/bhavanas and centers engaged in tackling the different aspects of rural rejuvenation and reconstruction. The genesis of Sriniketan lay in Tagore's scheme for rural reconstruction started in his ancestral estates as early as 1905. The present day campus was established in 1922 with focus on rejuvenation of village society through the development of village crafts, and improvement of health and agriculture through the methods of science.

⁷³Nag, "The Reel Tagore," 10.

⁷⁴*The Bengalee*, 28 March (1932).

⁷⁵The Santiniketan group could only allot five days as Tagore was then preparing to leave for Europe to raise funds for the Sriniketan project. The trip was eventually cancelled when Mahatma Gandhi, hearing that Tagore was undertaking the long journey in failing health, dissuaded him and arranged for funds.

⁷⁶*Chitravas*, Vols. 2&3 (14), 102; Also see B. N. Sircar, "Films Are Made in a Crisis All Over the World," in Jha, *B N Sircar*, 44.

⁷⁷"It was after a long time that I entered the New Theatres Studio....The place was abnormally quiet....Have I come to a dead land? But no! There stands the historic *Gol Ghar*, erected for Rabindranath." Robi Basu, "Those Days," *Bartaman*, 11 September (1994); "Natir Puja...was lost forever. Today, only the Gol Ghar...in the New Theatres complex stands solitary testimony to a story long banished into oblivion." Ashoke Nag, "The Reel Tagore," *The Telegraph Magazine*, 11.

⁷⁸*Filmland*, July (1933).

⁷⁹B. D. Bharucha, ed., *The Indian Cinematograph Year Book*, 74.

⁸⁰For details on the Bengal Congress' growing rift with the central leadership, see; Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 18-54, 103-149.

⁸¹Prafulla Chandra Ray, *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist* (Calcutta: Chuckerverty, Chatterjee & Co., Ltd., 1932.), Vol. 1, 471.

⁸²Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 55-102.

⁸³Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 18-102.

⁸⁴Led by Abdul Kasem Fazlul Haq, the Krishak Praja Party drew its strength from the mass following it enjoyed among Bengal's Muslim peasantry and intermediate shareholders.

⁸⁵Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 107-108.

⁸⁶Rajat Ray, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflict of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1979), 194.

⁸⁷Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 108.

⁸⁸Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 18-54, 103-149.

⁸⁹Joya Chatterji points out that while such legislation equally affected Muslim zamindars, "[For the] Muslim elites such as the Dacca Nawabs, economic losses in their estates promised to be amply compensated for by the rewards of office. But the Hindu zamindars faced the prospect of further economic loss without corresponding political gains," Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 107.

⁹⁰Nilanjana Chatterjee, "The East Bengal Refugees: A les-

son in survival," in Sukanta Chaudhuri ed., *Calcutta- The Living City*, Vol. II (Calcutta: OUP, 1990), 70-77.

⁹¹Ray, *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist*, Vol. II, 433-435, 451, 470.

⁹²Ray, *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist*, Vol. II, 472.

⁹³Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: OUP, 2002), 333.

⁹⁴John Broomfield, "The rural Parvenu: A Report of Research in Progress," in *Mostly About Bengal: Essays in Modern South Asian History*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1982), 240-257.

⁹⁵Omkar Goswami, "Calcutta's Economy: 1918-1970 The Fall From Grace," in *Calcutta—The Living City*, Chaudhuri ed., 88-96.

⁹⁶These initiatives had stemmed from the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal in the first decade of the twentieth century. For details see; Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-08* (New Delhi: Mcmillan, 1973).

⁹⁷Bhattacharya's first film was Madan Theatres' *Sati Lakshmi* (1925). This was followed by a long pause, and his film career actually started in 1929 when he joined Madan Theatres Ltd. as a salaried artist.

⁹⁸Dhiraj Bhattacharya, *Jakhan Nayak Chilam* (Calcutta: New Age Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2000), 45.

⁹⁹Marwari and Gujrati businessmen had been quick to appreciate the scope for profit in the fast-growing cinema industry. One of the first to invest in the industry was Lalji Haridas, a businessman from Kathiawar, who founded M/S Lalji Hemraj Haridas in Calcutta, a firm dealing in piece goods. In 1918 he secured the Bengal agency for the Kohinoor Film Company of Bombay, and became agent for Sharda Pictures in 1926. In 1930 he was managing Jupiter Cinema in Calcutta. With the advent of the talkies, he secured the distributing rights of, among others, Bombay's Wadia Movietone, Paramount Film Company, and Shree Vishnu Cinetone. In 1936-37, Haridas managed the Bharat Laxmi Theatre in Calcutta. By 1937-38, he was one of the leading distributors of Indian films in Eastern India, Burma, and the Far East, with offices in Calcutta, Rangoon, and Singapore respectively. In 1938, Lalji Hemraj Haridas were the sole agents of Wadia Movietone, Paramount, Indian Liberty Pictures, Shree Vishnu Cinetone, Jaybharat Movietone, Diamond Pictures, Daryani Productions, and Wishvakala Movietone for Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and Assam.

Similarly, Bajrang Lal Khemka, one of the first among the Marwaris to go into the film business, had been a dealer in piece goods, jute, and hessian; an importer of sugar and motor spare parts; and invested part of his profits therein in the fast expanding film industry. In 1932, soon after New Theatres was formed, Khemka started the East India Film Co. In 1937 he launched the Metropolitan Pictures in Calcutta. Soon he owned cinema houses in various parts of the country. Radha Kisen Chamria of Radha Film Co., Babulal Chowkani, proprietor, Bharat Laxmi Pictures, and exhibitor/distributors H. M. Chamria and Chandanmal Indrakumar were other Marwari business magnates who claimed a plum share of profits accruing from Bengal's film industry. These businessmen were close competitors of the Bengali *bhadralok*, men like B. N. Sircar; Anadi Bose,

proprietor of Aurora Film Corporation; P. N. Ganguly, proprietor of Kali Films; Sir P. C. Tagore, chairman of the board of directors of the Film Corporation of India Ltd.; or producer/distributor Prafulla Ghosh, proprietor of Prafulla Pictures formed in 1936. Aurora, for instance, though one of the leading “Bengali” distributors in Calcutta was evidently operating on a much smaller scale than Lalji Hemraj Haridas. Compared to the latter’s holding of sole distributing rights of eight Bombay concerns, Aurora, in 1938, was distributing for New Theatres Ltd., Radha Film Co., Bharat Laxmi Pictures, and Kali Films. Further, Aurora was not distributing for New Theatres in the most-significant eastern region, as revealed by Dossani Film Corporation’s claim of being the sole distributing agent for Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Assam, and Burma for New Theatres Ltd. B. D. Bharucha, ed., *The Indian Cinematograph Year Book* (Bombay: The Motion Picture Society of India, 1938).

¹⁰⁰Until the mid-1920s, there is no evidence of Bengali Muslims’ involvement with the cinema. The first involvement came in 1927 when members of the family of the Nawab of Dhaka made an experimental short film, *Sukumari*. In 1929, the same group embarked on the project of a full-length film, released as *The Last Kiss* in 1931. These initiatives apart, Bengali Muslim involvement in the film industry, through the 1930s was confined to solitary figures like Kazi Nazrul Islam and Abbasuddin Ahmed. Though later initiatives like the Chalachhitra Darshak Samiti (1939) and Bengal Tiger Pictures (1941) were patronized by some Muslim elites like Fazlul Haq and Humayun Kabir, they were marginal projects, and Bengali Muslims, by and large, remained detached from the film industry, so much so that Dhaka had no organized film industry until after independence.

¹⁰¹Boria Majumdar, “The Politics of Soccer in Colonial India, 1930–37: The Years of Turmoil,” in *Soccer and Society*, Vol. 3 (1) (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002).

¹⁰²Private papers of the Raja of Santosh, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti Bhavan.

¹⁰³Raja Sir Manmatha Nath Ray Chowdhury, “Does Cinema Read the Spirit of the Age,” *Filmland Puja Special* (1935).

¹⁰⁴Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 28.

¹⁰⁵*Bioscope*, Vol. 14, 8 (February 1930): 2.

¹⁰⁶*Chitra*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (May-October 1936): 4.

¹⁰⁷P. Trivedi, “Indian Film Industry—Our Difficulties,” *Filmland Puja Special* (1935), 42.

¹⁰⁸Pradip Krishen, “The Heady Thirties,” *Fifty Years of Indian Talkies (1931-81): A Commemorative Volume* (Bombay: Indian Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 1981), 40-44.

¹⁰⁹K. P. Ghose, “My Impressions of Bombay,” *Filmland, Puja Issue* (1934), reproduced in *Indian Cinema: Contemporary Perceptions from the Thirties, A Celluloid Chapter Documentation*, Bandopadhyay, ed. (Jamshedpur: Celluloid Chapter, 1993), 41.

¹¹⁰Jatindra Nath Mitra, “4th Feb 1931 to 31st Dec 1934: What Happened and What Will Happen?,” Editorial, *Moving Picture Monthly*, Annual Issue (1935), reproduced in *Indian Cinema: Contemporary Perceptions from the Thirties*, Bandopadhyay, ed., 29.

¹¹¹Baburao Patel, “Film Journalism Down the Ages,” *Fifty Years of Indian Talkies (1931-81)*.

¹¹²*Chitra*, December (1937).

¹¹³*Chitra*, December (1937).

¹¹⁴*Anandabazar Patrika*, 17 March (1922), from Dhiren Ganguli’s personal collection.

¹¹⁵See, Sudhirkumar Mitra, “Chalacchitrer Itihas,” in *Bangla Bhasbae Chalacchitra Charcha, 1923-33*, Debiprasad Ghosh, ed., 61-63.

¹¹⁶Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 52.

¹¹⁷The New Theatres’ emblem.

¹¹⁸*The Sunday Statesman*, 30 November 1980.

¹¹⁹Kironmoy Raha, *Bengali Cinema* (Calcutta: Nandan West Bengal Film Centre, 1991), 72.

¹²⁰From 1976-77, most of Uttam Kumar’s films failed at the box office. For details see Gourangaprasad Ghosh, *Amar Ami* (Calcutta: Dey’s Publishing, 1980). Suchitra Sen’s last film was *Pronoy Pasha* (1978).

¹²¹A generic term used to refer to the formulaic Hindi film.

¹²²Instituted in 1953, the Indian equivalent of the Oscars.

¹²³Ghosh, *Amar Ami*, 140.

¹²⁴Raha, *Bengali Cinema*, 72.

¹²⁵“He made no attempt to copy Hindi popular films and did not rely on stars. He invented his own Bengali formula of escapist entertainment and served his fare in a manner which the Bengali viewers liked.”; Raha, *Bengali Cinema*, 72.

¹²⁶“The films that were made in Calcutta, by and for the middle class, were mostly inspired by literature... Bengali cinema became Bengali middle class sentiments peppering romance and music”; Rajat Ray, *Banglar Chalacchitra Sanskriti* (Calcutta: Srishti Prakashan, 2001), 15.