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WHEN WAS THE ‘STUDIO ERA’ IN BENGAL: TRANSITION, TRANSFORMATIONS AND CONFIGURATIONS DURING THE 1930s

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the moment of transition during early 1930s and revisits the industrial shifts, which were taking place in Calcutta, Bengal, with the arrival of the sync-sound mechanism and what is popularly described as ‘Talkies’. Through a close-reading of film magazines of the period it shows how such transformations, at the level of film cultures and practices, were taking place and the manner in which certain houses were investing in sound systems, which activated the consolidation of the studios. This paper, however, emphasizes on the silent films, which circulated simultaneously, and draws attention to the gradual growth of the studios, emergence of new configurations and popular debates, which highlight how cinema in Bengal was *also* imagined with regard to Hollywood hits, other than the fact that it was located in the ‘*bazaar*’.

Keywords: Indian studios, silent cinema, New Theatres, Bengali cinema, comedy, talkies, sound technology, public culture, early stardom, fan cultures

The Moment of Transition

The question ‘when’ was studio era in Bengal provokes another query that enquires ‘what’ was studio era in Bengal. In my own research on the formation of the studios in Calcutta, Bengal, which were not restricted to the production of Bengali language films, I have tackled the ways in which studios (like New Theatres Ltd., 1931-1955) – with relative control over production-distribution-exhibition – were imagined, launched, and functioned.¹ Nevertheless, writing histories regarding the development of the studios located across British India (for example in Poona, Bombay, Madras) have never been easy for a range of reasons. First, is the problem of reliable primary material, which were either destroyed by fire, dust, and moisture or wiped out because of the utter disregard on the part of the producers and others.² Such conditions make the project of mounting any history of the “studios”, in the lines of the Hollywood studios, a

daunting task. Kaushik Bhaumik,³ followed by Ranita Chatterjee,⁴ therefore, focus on the cities (Bombay and Calcutta, respectively), its vicissitudes, public spaces and cultures, and thereby, sketch an engaging graph of cinema's (new) industrial networks. Bhaumik, however, problematizes the consolidation of the Bombay studios and the expansion of the theatres (or picture-palaces) in specific localities, in relation to Bombay cinema's trans-regional circuits. While Chatterjee has been able to source some of the papers of Aurora Film Corp., Calcutta, other than the official records found in National archives, Bhaumik, interestingly, refers to newspapers (like *Bombay Chronicle*), film magazines of the period etc., as well as by means of a range of interviews, frames a distinctive argument regarding cinema's location in the "Bazaar". My unpublished Ph.D thesis (2008) on the establishment of the studios (like New Theatres Ltd.) vis-à-vis the political-cultural milieu of 1930s-1940s, public debates in Bengal and technological transformations, consider the divergent cinematic modes, and critiques the want for an idealized Bengali language cinema by the *Bhadrolok*. I utilise multiple sources including official records, film magazines (comprising news, reviews, editorials, letters to the editors, film publicity, gossips, magazine spreads etc.), memoirs (written in Bengali), interviews, narrative history of the theatres and so on, in order to produce a complex account of film styles and film production during the period.

Secondly, and nevertheless, information sourced by means of the studios remain elusive; moreover, there was, in fact, no "grand design" on part of the studios in India, though production strategies went through massive structural changes with the advent of sync-sound, and the arrival of a plethora of sound machines (from Europe and North America), alongside the entry of partially trained technicians, artists, writers, and music-composers et al.⁵ While fresh generic tendencies emerged by reworking certain elements of the so-called old, the need for technological augmentation, skilful and creative labour, and costs of production increased several folds in such contexts. Likewise, the growth of language specific cinema redefined production systems and the market. And yet, the big studios (located in Bombay, Calcutta and elsewhere) neither necessarily collaborated with each other (like the Hollywood's big five and little three) nor were these fully vertically integrated. Additionally, most of the companies rarely had impressive control over business across geographies (like MGM for example), even when they built single theatres in certain localities, and some houses (like Aurora) distributed films of other 'national' companies (including those of New Theatres). Certainly, directors, performers (meaning both actors and singers), technicians (both 'foreign' and local), writers and other personnel were employed and were on a payroll; nevertheless, a number of popular actors (like Kanan Bala aka Kanan Debi, Durgadas Bandyopadhyay from Bengal or Durga Khote of Poona and others), as well as established directors (like Debaki Kumar Bose,

Pramathesh Chandra [or PC] Barua) and veteran authors (like Premankur Atorthy) et al, worked with disparate organisations at the same point in time, even though they were guided by a contract (and made films outside their own interests in order to support the studios). It is well-known how production companies in India were dominated by the norms of kinship, and the manner in which the proprietor functioned as the grand patriarch.⁶ Briefly, an “assembly line production”, a strict “division of labour” or a “Fordian” model were seldom deployed or achieved considering that several artists and technicians delivered multiple roles. Nitin Bose of New Theatres, for instance, was both a respected cinematographer as well as a director; similarly, Amar Mullick was both a popular (comic) actor and the Production Manager of the company.⁷ Notwithstanding the above issues, what studios like New Theatres Ltd., Prabhat Film Co., Poona, or Ranjit Film Co., Bombay, Wadia Movietone, Bombay, Bombay Talkies, and others, did aspire to accomplish was a distinguishable studio style, which was produced by channelizing their resources and talents, as well as through thoughtful publicity and marketing strategies.

Douglas Gomery proposes that, considering Hollywood was a profit-making enterprise, the integration of production-distribution-exhibition implied -- those who owned the prestigious picture-palaces effectively controlled the business. Furthermore, studies on the arrival of the Talkies indicate the manner in which the existing studios reorganized themselves and collaborated with the new entrants to remain in business.⁸ Tino Balio in his anthology on Hollywood (1930-1939) as a “modern enterprise” further problematises the subject of the studio system. He studies the movies as a “social institution” and discusses the various modes of self-regulation, formation of bodies and boards, and the impact of ‘Oligopoly’ because of which all parties involved benefited.⁹ In the introduction to the volume Balio writes how¹⁰:

[t]he thirties transformed the American film industry into a modern business enterprise. No longer run by their founders as family businesses, motion-picture companies were managed by hierarchies of salaried executives [...] Afterward, the relationship of banks to motion pictures changed. Commercial bankers offered financial services [...].¹¹

Clearly, nothing close to the above-discussed points happened within the map of British India, and thus, there are multiple points of differences and departures, which guide our exploration of the “studio era” in India. For example, the manner in which with the arrival of the Talkies the mammoth and monopolistic organisation Madan Theatres, Calcutta, lost its country-wide standing requires exhaustive reflections.¹² Indeed, the moment marked a remarkable shift as far as production modes were concerned, and, as research has shown, a number of producers and technicians scrambled over technological augmentation and import of technical know-how.¹³

It is within such shifting contexts that this paper seeks to understand ‘what’ were the industrial and cultural conditions during the early 1930s, that kicked off an intensification of production and exhibition, and ‘how’ certain well known studios initially gained a foothold, and achieved a particularly high status in due course, despite the above discussed incongruities and the gradual conversion to “sound”. I, therefore, employ a close-reading (as opposed to an extensive research) of certain Calcutta based English film magazines, like *Film Land* and *Varieties Weekly*, published during 1931 (located through research conducted under the Media Lab, Jadavpur University), in order to examine in what manner the field was transforming.¹⁴ To borrow from Bhaumik, what emanates from this research is a sense of the¹⁵:

dynamic transformation of social relations in Indian society under the impact of market and technology. [Besides] The *bazaar* was where this transformation was taking place. [...] More importantly, this cinema was itself located in the *bazaar*. The cosmopolitan *bazaar* cinema melded into the hectic traffic outside. [...] The audience read or heard about larger-than-life adventure heroes and heroines from stories told or published in the *bazaar*, read about thrilling real-life adventures in the newspapers, [...].

Subsequently, I mull over writings in Bengali published in popular bi-lingual film magazines such as *Chitrapanji*, in an effort to both glean historical information as well as analyse how a self-reflective historical mapping was transpiring within such language-based set ups.

Modes of Transformation

It is well known that India’s first Talkie *Alam Ara* (d. Ardeshir Irani, 1931) was released in March 1931. *Filmiland*’s 14th March, 1931 issue informs us that while *Alam Ara* was “expected to be shortly released at the Majestic Cinema, Bombay”, Madan Theatres, with the aid of foreign technicians and R C A Photophone System, had already released their film at Crown Talkie House, Calcutta, during the said week.¹⁶ *Filmiland*, however, suggested that this cannot be “deemed Madan’s own Talkie”, and instead emphasised on a forthcoming *silent* film *Chor-Kanta*¹⁷, which was produced by International Film Craft, distributed by Radha Films, and released at Chitra (of New Theatres). Moreover, the editorial note stated that, Bengal’s film companies were “effervescent” (or fizzy and transient), which made the situation complicated. This is supplemented by advertisements of diverse types of *silent* films distributed by Aurora Film Corp. (also producers), Pearl Films (also owner of Pearl Cinema, Calcutta) and Mansata Film Hiring Services (distributors of Bombay based productions) etc. [See Figs. 1 2].



A scene from I. F. Craft's "Chashar Meye"



Amar Mallik (as Mallik) Santi Gupta (as Boudi)
& Rajib Roy (as Sadhu) in the film "Chore-Kanta"

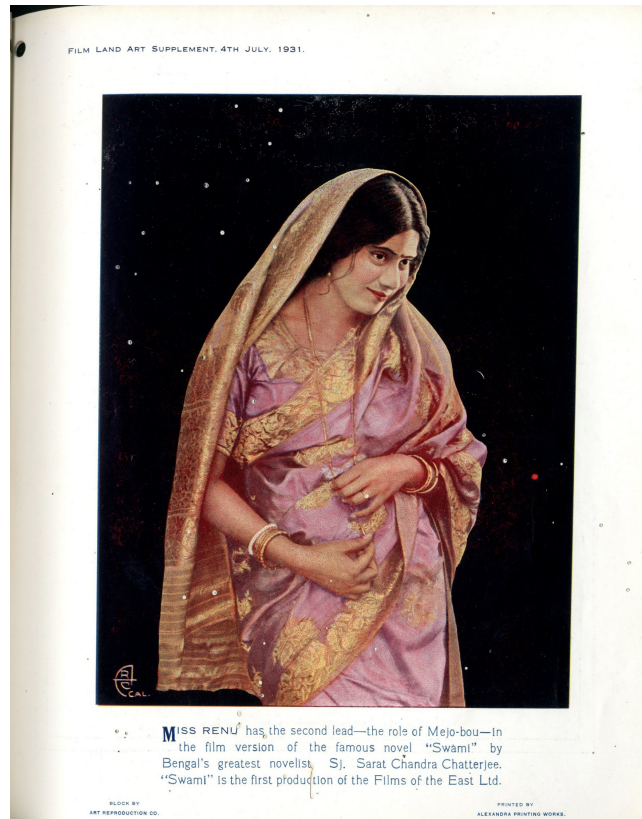
Figures 1 & 2: Chor-Kantha and Chasar Meye Print Publicity

Thus, while a large body of films of disparate genres, which included films like *Veer Bala*¹⁸ and *Telephone Girl*¹⁹ starring Sulochana, as well as Harold Llyod's comedies and MGM's "Pre-code" drama like *Madame X*,²⁰ were circulating in the public sphere, I wish to draw attention to the fashion in which images of the silent film *Chor-Kanta* dominated the scene. In point of fact, the 4th April issue of *Filmland*, 1931, not only publicised the release of *Chor-Kanta* but, also exclaimed that, "[l]et us hope that it [*Chor-Kanta*] will be a 'treat' for picture-lovers of Bengal, as both the author and director [Charu Roy] are master artists in their own sphere".²¹ The rapid introduction of film magazines during this period, their reporting styles, self-proclaimed agendas, notes and prejudices (against Madans especially) indicate a tussle over the production system and the market (and the 'bazaar'), which at this stage were somewhat "artisanal" and comprised relatively minor/ transient companies, a host of inventive mechanisms, self-taught technicians and story-tellers, and a number of artists who had arrived from disparate fields including theatre.²²

Likewise, the 4th of July issue of *Filmland*, 1931, introducing "tri-colour" picture plates, announced the release of Films of East Co.'s silent production *Swami*,²³ at Chitra.²⁴ Truly, while "Talkie" waves were hitting the scene, it must be underscored that "silent" films, both old and new, were actually flooding the market, and the reviews of such films—especially those made by distinguished directors like Charu Roy—were far more favourable than the early Talkie ventures by Madans and others. The June 6 issue of *Filmland*, 1931, for instance, included a full-page advertisement of *Swami*, which was an adaptation of the renowned author Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's (nee Chatterjee) novel of the same name.²⁵ The advertisement used a film-still, which presented the characters in a realistic setting, thereby evoked a typical scene from a Bengali (Hindu) household. *Swami* was praised by *Filmland* for *not* using sets and because "pictures were taken at apt locations and interiors".²⁶ Moreover, *Varieties Weekly* confirmed that²⁷:

as a whole the production is a good one, and gives us promise that the producers will give us some really artistic productions in the future. [...] it delighted one's heart to see the attention that has been paid to the small details.

While the growth of studios in Bengal has been discussed vis-à-vis a desire for Bengali language films and *Bhadralok* cinema, from such perspectives, I wish to highlight the aesthetic concerns and the fervent want of realistic narratives, which were often designed by the magazine editorials, in order to mould public preferences.²⁸ [See Figs. 3 & 4]



Figures 3 & 4: Advertisements of Swami

While Madan's Talkie ventures were generally trashed by the critics²⁹, *Filmland* also critiqued Madan's over-all attempts to produce "Bengali" films. The editorial of the same issue therefore, asserted that³⁰:

[w]e may assure them that the only instance of good photography which was an outdoor dancing scene with 'Nirela' was shot not by the present 'experts' of Madan studio, but by Fox Movietone experts who visited India nearly a year ago and recorded the Bengalee [original spelling] song 'Kunje Kunje Punje Punje' [roughly 'in the flowering shrub'] for synchronising with a scene in their talkie "Behind the Curtain".

Other than describing Madan's production conditions as "rotten", the editorial elaborated on how the number of "Bengali" productions were increasing, though summer time releases (when students return to their home towns) and dearth of movie-theatres were effecting profits. It also expressed concern over the fact that, there were no "electric studios" (or no uses of artificial light inside the studio) due to which the studios remained idle and shooting was halted during "wet months" or the monsoons.

The June 6 issue of *Filmland*, 1931 marked the beginning of New Theatres Talkie productions, its acquisition of the rights of several (Chattopadhyay's) novels, as well as highlighted the accounts of its constructions (a "garden at Dum Dum", North of Calcutta, along with "talkie implements" and so on).³¹ Alongside this, the issue also indicated the phasing out of International Film Craft, B N Sircar's (proprietor New Theatres) initial venture that produced silent films like *Chor Kanta* and *Chasar-Meye*.³² A close-reading of the magazines shows how New Theatres' initial foray into the Talkie scene became successful particularly because it was one of the 'firsts' to build a Talkie studio, as well as by the means of its prime theatre – Chitra that, regularly screened films of other production houses and a range of Hollywood hits. The August 8, 1931 issue of *Filmland*, reported about New Theatres' pioneering sound studio being built at Tollygunge (South of Calcutta), and announced that its production would commence from October, in the same year.³³ More important, New Theatres were also distributors of Talkie equipment, which were complimented by the writings of W E Demming, Jr, published consistently in *Varieties Weekly*. Additionally, and ironically, *Filmland* announced the death of Rustomji, the managing director of Madans;³⁴ just as, a full-page publicity image of "India's First Talkie-Drama" *Alam Ara*, along with Krishnatone, Bombay's "All Talking, Singing, Dancing" film *Grihalaxmi* (in which Rampiyari sang "sweet and melodious songs") heralded a new chapter in film production.

It is, as a matter of fact, apparent from such a study that by June 1931 the scene was opening up with news about a number of Talkie productions, considering films produced from Bombay went up from 99 (during April 1929-March 1930) to 136 during April 1930- March 1931, with Ranjit and Kohinoor heading the list³⁵; as well, special sections on stars and studios

of Hollywood became a pivotal aspect of film magazines. Moreover, *Filmland's* (1931) 18th July issue gives an account of nine new production companies, which were setup in Calcutta -- these include P C Barua's company, Rupam Film Co., Films of East Co., Heera Film Co., etc.³⁶ Significant for this paper, is the news about Barua's experiments with artificial lights, which signposted the transforming production conditions. *Filmland* described that, "[w]e were invited to a night shooting of "Aparadhi" [directed by Debaki Bose] [...] the elaborate and splendid arrangements of electric lights encourage us to expect a better picture from the stand point of photography."³⁷ Moreover, *Varieties Weekly* continually informed the public about *Aparadhi's* progress, and also covered Barua's life and works.³⁸ During this time, an editorial of *Filmland* noted that:³⁹

[t]he record of building of laboratories and studios during this year of crisis is the most progressive of all. There is a distinct tendency to own and possess own studios with equipments [sic] and laboratories unlike in former years. It is certainly a healthy symptom for the stability of the industry.



Sabita Devi, a player and Kumar Barua in the film "Aparadhi"

Figure 5



Figures 5 & 6: Publicity Images of Aparadhi

Other than this, *Filmland* regularly narrated the growth of film production in Bombay, Madras, Poona, Bangalore and elsewhere, though it continued to feature advertisements of silent films like *Kovalan*⁴⁰ of Garuntee Film Co., Madras, and *Chandrasena*⁴¹ of Prabhat etc., which were released in Calcutta during this time. Likewise, such film magazines also featured notices by "commercial artists" who were eager to do posters and designs of the new types of films circulating in the market, alongside full-page advertisements of a range of sound equipment, notices for recruitment of

actors (for Barua's next) and so on. Also, announcements to entice people to use buses, which became a common feature by the mid 1930s, show how cinema was remapping the city and reinventing cultural practices and industrial networks.⁴² [See Figs. 5 & 6].

The 4th July issue *Filmiland*, 1931, conveyed that New Theatres was building a new "talkie house" or theatre after Chitra, and informed that Purna theatre and Empress theatre (of Madans) would "soon be wired" for Talkies, even though "tri-colour" advertisements regarding the releases of silent films like *Pujari* (d. Niranjan Pal, 1931) an Aurora production, as well as those of *Niyoti* (d. Jogesh Chowdhury, 1931) and *Chup/ Hush* (d. Hiren Bose, 1931) suggest that, "Talking films", as a formal mode, was yet to make a dent in the elite circuits.⁴³ Nevertheless, by September 1931 there was news about more "Talkie" theatres—like Baby Pearl, New Park Cinema, Rung Mahal, Chhabi-ghar etc.,—being built across central Calcutta.⁴⁴ While most of these theatres were inaugurated by eminent personalities of Calcutta, the opening of Baby Pearl, as an advertisement in *Varieties Weekly* implies, was a big affair since it offered a car (a Baby Austin), gold watch, and a (Benarasi) sari to its patrons, who were chosen via a lucky draw.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the 26th September issue of *Varieties Weekly*, 1931, narrated how Baby Pearl was an exceptional example of contemporary viewing cultures and reported that, "[b]y the side of "Baby Pearl" has been laid out a most beautiful garden, and in this garden will be opened two restaurants which will cater for [sic] all tastes."⁴⁶ Such growth of new companies, import of sound equipment, and emergence of "Talkie-houses", alongside the continued popularity of silent films (especially comedies and adaptations), indicate the



Figures 7 & 8: Advertisements of *Hush* and *Niyoti*



tussle over the market, re-formation of the 'bazaar' and new industrial conditions. [See Figs. 7 & 8].

In comparison to *Filmiland*, issues of *Varieties Weekly* launched in 1931 ("dedicated to the upliftment & popularisation of the Indian Cinema Industry") reported primarily about Hollywood productions, stars (such as Greta Garbo) and directors (like Chaplin and Cecil De Mille), and quickly shifted its focus from camera, lights, filter etc., to the technical aspects of sound recording, re-recording, processes of developing sound films and so on, by mid-1931. However, other than the advertisements of a wide range of sound equipment, *Varieties Weekly* also carried publicity information of P.C. Barua's forthcoming silent venture (*Aparadhi*, 1931), film shows at Chitra, even when it reported about the opening of Chhabi-ghar at Harrison Road, Calcutta, which was initially scheduled on 15th August 1931.⁴⁷ While the next issue announced a day's delay, *Varieties Weekly* dated 29th August 1931 declared further delay of the inauguration due to conflicting reasons ("superstition" and/or "finishing touches necessary"), even when it also published Chhabi-ghar's elaborate design/ plan.⁴⁸ The opening finally took place on 19th September 1931, following which *Varieties Weekly* appreciated its design and the fact that it was the only Talkie-theatre in the area.⁴⁹

Varieties Weekly's particular interest in technological "upliftment" prompts further deliberations considering that it regularly advertised about a "Swadeshi" (/ Nationalist) store on Russa Road, Calcutta, alongside a series titled "Our Cinema Industry and its Troubles" (penned by the editor, which included "troubles" like "The Producer", "The Director", "The Technician", "The Artiste", "Publicity", "The Press", "The Public", and so on)⁵⁰. *Varieties Weekly* dated the 22nd of August 1931 announced the commencement of a column by W E Demming (Jr.) primarily for the technicians (whereas *Filmiland* frequently published articles by the Asian actor Sheikh Iftikhar Rasool, who was relatively successful in Hollywood).⁵¹ *Varieties Weekly* declared that Demming who worked with Radio Installation Co., Los Angeles, California, has been employed by New Theatres to construct its new sound studio.⁵² Note, Radio Installation Co., was the manufacturer of Rico sound units, and *Varieties Weekly* recurrently carried out advertisements of both Rico sound recording equipments as well as advertisements of "Complete Double Set of R C A Talkie Projectors with Operators" distributed by New Theatres. Moreover, the advertisements of Rico sound systems demonstrate that New Theatres were also distributing the same. Therefore, on one hand, New Theatres targeted the producers and supported them to build Talkie studios, on the other; it was enticing the exhibitors to "convert" their theatres into Talkie-houses. The 5th September issue of *Varieties Weekly*, 1931, presents a visual triad that encompass Demming's writing on "Noiseless Recording" intercepted by an (box) insert of Bharat Shilpa Bhandar for "Swadeshi"

goods and adjacent to which an advertisement by New Theatres for the Talkie machines is placed.⁵³ Such juxtaposing provokes me to comment on the fashion in which subjects of nationalism, technology and cinema were speaking to each other and were thereby, imagining a particular category of cinema-going public. One may also zoom into the fact that, while there were multiple reasons for New Theatres eventual success (including B N Sircar's illustrious background and NT's cinematic tropes, which were reinforced through considerable amount of historical re-construction by the Bengali press), its initial footing – as this paper shows – was in fact, via distribution of sound equipment, which effectively pushed the case of the Talkies to the forefront.⁵⁴

The 1931 (Durga) Puja Issue of *Filmland* presented a comprehensive summation of the year that was. An article on the “Principal Film Directors of Bengal” for example, listed the major players and elaborated on their life and works.⁵⁵ This catalogue included directors like Jyotish Bannerjee (of Madans), Debaki Bose, Modhu Bose, Tincowrie Chakraborty (of Radha Films), Priyanath Ganguli (of Madans), Dhiren Ganguli, Nirranjan Pal, Charu Roy, Profulla Roy, and others. Note, Debaki Bose and Dhiren Ganguli collaborated with each other and

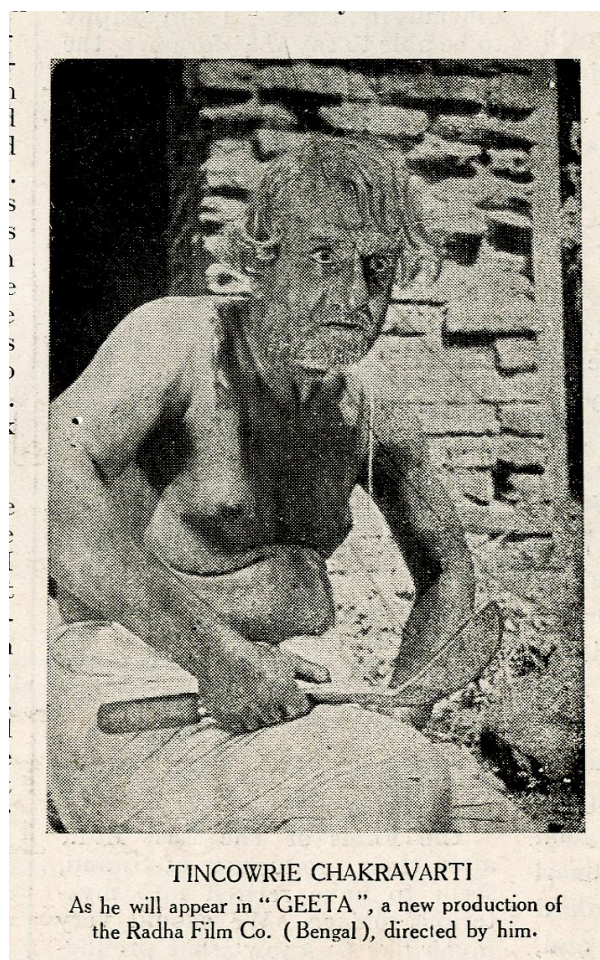


Figure 9: Tincowrie Chakraborty



Figure 10: Charu Roy

worked with multiple production houses.⁵⁶ Similarly, Modhu Bose, one of the most illustrious directors of the 1930s, had worked with producers like Himanshu Rai for *Light of Asia* (d. Franz Osten, Himanshu Rai, 1925), and later joined Sree Bharat Lakshmi Pictures, Calcutta, following a stint with Madan Theatres. Additionally, Nirranjan Pal, Charu Roy and Profulla Roy were actively involved with Himanshu Rai's productions as author, art-director, and actor/assistant director respectively; moreover, both the Roys worked with Sree Bharat Lakshmi Pictures later. [See Figs. 9 & 10].

The concern expressed in the above-mentioned article over their international exposure and experiences is a point that I shall delve into in the latter section of this paper. But, what is engaging at this point, is the complicated map of the industry, which emerges through *Filmiland's* reports on the studios of Bengal, involving companies which were still producing silent films (like Madans, Indian Kinema Arts, Arya Films, P C Barua Studio), along with Bombay based houses (like Imperial Film Co., Ranjit Film Co., Sarada Film Co., Sagar Film Co. etc.), Prabhat (then based in Kolhapur, Maharashtra), as well as companies located in Madras such as General Picture Corp., Associated Film Ltd., and so on.⁵⁷ This issue also included several "tri-colour" advertisements of forthcoming "silent" films, news regarding the major actors, and publicity material issued by distributors addressing the exhibitors. Moreover, it comprised articles like "The Future Cinema"⁵⁸, alongside Nirranjan Pal's famed article "Psychology Vs. Action In Scenario Writing,"⁵⁹ and N C Laharry's more technical note on the "Making of a Talking Picture."⁶⁰ Prior to this, the 18th of July issue of *Filmiland*, 1931, presented a "Half-yearly statement of Bengal Productions" and reported⁶¹, among other events, that a) on March 14, Bengal had released its first talking-film at Crown Cinema, Calcutta, b) on March 15, Douglas Fairbanks visited Calcutta, c) on the 29th of April, the revered artist and author Abanindranath Tagore inaugurated a "Cinema Library" at Central Calcutta, and also during the same period Arya Film Co., was converted into a "Limited Concern", which in effect, chalk out a complex graph of the gradual transformation that was ensuing with the arrival of the Talkies, though the continued popularity of "silent" films (both of feature-length adaptation of novels and comic shorts) bring to light the divergent trajectories of cinema of the period.

Emergent Film Forms

The connections between Himanshu Rai's early (international) productions and early films in Bengal have not yet been adequately explored. However, the magazines of the period cogitated in length how directors like Nirranjan Pal, Charu Roy, Modhu Bose et al, were involved with Rai's productions. Charu Roy (albeit often lampooned by *Filmiland*) was related to Rai (Roy

in Bengali); he worked as costume designer for *Prem Sanyas*,⁶² and also acted in *Shiraz*,⁶³ and in the Franz Osten classic *A Throw of Dice*.⁶⁴ Roy's Bengal based films, especially *Swami* and *Chor-Kanta*, were (as discussed earlier) appreciated for location shooting and a realist mode. Moreover, a later film, *Bangalee*,⁶⁵ produced by Shree Bharat Lakshmi Pictures, is still considered to be a pioneering realistic film that dealt with the everyday of a Bengali (Hindu) house-hold. In comparison to Roy, Niranjan Pal had a far more distinguished career and magazines of the period were not only publishing his articles on aesthetics, they also focused on his experiences during Himanshu Rai/Franz Osten "trilogy" *Prem Sanyas*, *Shiraz* and *A Throw of Dice*. Pal was in fact, celebrated for his revolutionary background (son of Bipin Chandra Pal, as well, he earned some degree of notoriety by snatching the revolver of a British Officer during 1910s), and his sojourn across Europe, varied involvements and training with European productions. Furthermore, his authorship was believed to be crucial in the making of Bengali language cinema. It is therefore, not surprising that "tri-colour" plates of his "Bengali" venture *Pujari* (1931), an Aurora production, roofed the pages of magazines like *Filmland*, even when the 'Talkies' had sort of arrived. While Pal went on to become one of the most



Figures 11&12: Multiple Versions of Pujari

celebrated writers of Bombay Talkies during 1930s, his Bengal-phase is crucial in understanding how this transitory moment was crisscrossed by manifold cinematic tendencies, in-flow and out-flow of varied content, concepts, and knowledge. [See figs. 11 & 12].

While Roy's and Pal's Bengal productions have not survived history's wearing away and historical withering, one of the very few silent "Bengali" films that were lost and found is

Kalipada Das's comic-short -- *Jamai Babu*.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, it is hard to find a biography of Kalipada Das, even when the film magazines of the period indicate that he was also an actor, and had a definitive flair for comedy. Das's films were quite successful (as apparent from the reviews), and he remade his film *Jamai Babu* as *Manik Jor* in 1952. Howbeit, his career never really took off during the Talkie period, at the point when the big and small studios controlled production, and New Theatres' "reality effect" dominated public debates.⁶⁷ While Das has been virtually forgotten, the well-known New Cinema director Mrinal Sen found the film accidentally during a shooting of his film sometime in the 1980s. *Jamai Babu's* (/ brother-in-law and/or groom) plot revolves around the proverbial "village-buffoon" who arrives at the big city, and is marvelled by its magnitude. However, the (*boka* or foolish) *Jamai* has arrived at the city to visit his lawfully wedded wife, and thus, during the latter half of the film, at the time he reaches his in-law's house, a series of misadventures and misunderstandings take place, in the course of which he is mistaken as a thief.

A scene-by scene analysis of the film demonstrates how at least two or more types of film styles were jostling with each other. The first half of the film in fact, deploys a documentary-style location shooting, which is mixed with slapstick comedy and physical action. Therefore, as the so-called *Jamai-Babu* ventures into the sprawling colonial city, he is overwhelmed by cars, peoples, buildings and hoardings. Das maps the lived and animated city in which this "Babu" arrives at Sealdah Station (central Calcutta), checks-in at a nearby hostel at Scott lane (now Raj Kumar Chakrabarty Sarani), thereafter, as he decides to tour the city alone, he is lost amidst the madness and the crowd. This act triggers a series of comic-scenes shot across the city, as he traverses Bow Bazaar area, Wellington (now Nirmal Chandra) Street, and finally lands near the Governor's house. Thereafter, as *Jamai-Babu* looks around and enters a shop with his "nonsensical" query ("where is this address 'nuisance' [inscribed on a paper]" he asks), he is physically thrown/pushed out following which he is rescued by his brother-in-law. Long shots of the city—portraying cars, houses, shops, hoardings, recognizable places—as well as gestures of the period and physical movement generate a sensorial engagement with the city. Afterwards, the scene shifts to touristic locations, like the famed Victoria Memorial and popular sites inclusive of the (Dhakuria) Lake area (developed in 1920s) etc.,—places where young couples meet, and those which inform us about the contemporary public sphere, and the ways in which the public in the cities were negotiating "modernity". The second half of the film, however, is shot in the interiors, largely through mid-shots and close-ups, and is mounted against a stage-like setting. Alluring, nevertheless, is the plotting of the film, which allows the two brothers-in-law to lead their respective wives to their bedrooms, and then, seal the much-awaited meeting with a kiss.

Das is described as a “young enthusiastic director,”⁶⁸ and his next film, *Ankhijol* (/Tears) is summed up as a story of an irresponsible husband and a father who returns from jail to be mistaken as a “thief” by his son (played by Das). Will “[t]ragedy” which is “a daily occurrence in Bengalee life” rule “for ever”, is a question that the note on *Ankhijol* raises. Such comic films, I contend, are deeply connected to popular theatre, and to the widely circulated anecdotes/ gags, and cultures of physicality in Bengal. While comedy, parody and farce have a long history in Bengali theatre, cinema, and in other genres of performance, and remains one of the most popular tropes till date, nonetheless, in the later period it is often restricted to verbal humour, wit, puns etc.⁶⁹ Academic research pertaining to studio-socials and action films have paid attention to industrial drifts, technological changes, the intent of the studios, along with the work of influential figures; however, the persistence of such comic-mode, physical action (Jamai-Babu’s recurrent fall, for example), transgressions (the lip-to-lip kiss, for instance), movement (including dance) etc., highlight subjects of bodily pleasures, sufferings and fantasies. Truly, even though the comic-mode and physicality were repeatedly panned by the popular press, these continued to be significant fragments of cinema in Bengal, notwithstanding its relegation in favour of a stylised, novelistic story-telling. In the last section of the paper hence, I underscore the significance of popular writings (like fan-poems), as well as manifold imaginings and transgressions, which became a critical aspect of Bengali language cinema and public debates. By scanning *Chitrapanji*, a Bilingual magazine, I show how the “public” imagined cinema, the prevalent concerns, early fandom (vis-a-vis Hollywood stars), and the fashion in which, by the mid 1930s, the scene was pulsating with films of disparate categories. [See figs. 13 & 14].



Figures 13&14: Avatars of Kalipada Das

The Body, the Shadow and the Magic

By the mid 1930s New Theatres had released some of its major films including *Chandidas*⁷⁰ and *Devdas*.⁷¹ *Chandidas* in particular, was valued by the press for its evocative songs, music and background score (by Rai Chand Boral), as well as for its radical content (which is a love-story between an upper-caste priest and a lower-caste widowed washer woman); and eventually, it became a milestone in ‘Talkie’ history.⁷² The film’s long run in the theatres, and continual appreciation by the press, consolidated New Theatres’ position to a great extent. Furthermore, New Theatres collaborated with companies like Aurora, and other houses based in Bombay, and created a dent in the North Indian market following the releases of *Devdas* (Hindi) and *Puran Bhakt*.⁷³ A poem “Who are they” published in *Chitrapanji* for example, expressed its growing influence:⁷⁴

Cinema has enchanted the world, there is cacophony around us/ everyone is chanting the names of the heroines/ everybody is speaking of ‘Garbo’, ‘Kanan’, ‘Chandra’, ‘Jamuna’/ It is difficult to walk around, what do you say, my friend? / A crowd waited at ‘Chitra’ on the day of *Devdas*’ release/ Even the beggar saved up to enter the ‘hall’ [...]

The rest of the poem comments on Barua (about his fashion and films) and on Uma Sashi, the charming actor of *Chandidas*. Indeed, while theatres like Chitra were becoming important sites and provoked many discussions, such fan-poems became a regular feature by the mid-1930s. Likewise, articles by K. A. Abbas, published in *Film India* (from Bombay) as well as letters to the editor, news, reports, reviews, features etc., show New Theatres’ cultural influence, and its industrial growth across Northern territories. However, it must be noted that, there were a host of other producers from Bengal, who were commonly shooting (both Bengali and Hindi) films in their “garden houses”, and thereafter, releasing those via “independent” theatres like Rupabani, Chhabi-ghar and so on.⁷⁵ The Hindi film, *Seeta*⁷⁶ produced by East India Films, and distributed by New Theatres, as case in point, carved a new benchmark by becoming the “first” Indian film to be screened at the 3rd Venice Film Festival. While only few houses exercised control over the business and the market as well as over public perceptions in the ways in which New Theatres did, I wish to draw attention to the vast field that was marked by films of disparate genres, modes, with varying intents, and thereby, focus on the conflicting nature of public conversations, and rethink methods of writing history of the period.

The April-May issue of *Chitrapanji*, 1934, published an article, seemingly narrated by a close-friend of Greta Garbo (and retold in Bengali), recounts in what ways she had retained her unique traits despite being a celebrated Hollywood star. The article stresses that she not only preferred Swedish food, but also on the manner in which she listened to the Swedish National

Anthem, and missed her ex-lover, whom she had left behind in Sweden.⁷⁷ Such extravagant writings on Hollywood stars were often accompanied by comprehensive news regarding Hollywood releases in Calcutta, as well as news about studios like New Theatres, Kali Films, Radha Films, Bharat Lakshmi Pictures, East India Films, Devdutta Films etc. Similarly, *Chitrapanji* (December-January 1934) not only carried advertisements of other magazines such as *Kheyali* (Bengali), *Deepali* (Bengali), *Filmland*, *Film World*, *Sound and Shadow* (published from Madras),⁷⁸ it also noted the need for a Central Board of Censors, and informed the readers on subjects of upcoming films, directors, stars, and correspondingly published a report on Garbo's involved performance during the shooting of *Queen Christina*.^{79,80} In this article, Garbo is described as a "Goddess"; furthermore, *Chitrapanji* also printed articles on/ by actors like Mae West, Joan Crawford, Katharine Hepburn and others.⁸¹ The March-April issue of *Chitrapanji*, 1934, also brought out a lengthy feature on Kanan Bala,⁸² her early struggles, training in music, work during the silent era, and her exceptional work in the contemporary times.⁸³ In this write-up Kanan Bala's beauty is compared to a flower, while the author explains how she makes the audience laugh, cry, and fall in love. Also, the August-September issue of *Chitrapanji*, 1937, printed a poem, which explicated the beauty of the Bengali female-actors, especially Kanan Bala.⁸⁴ It stated that, "you are the temple-girl/ your voice flows like a stream/ you are the garden-girl [Kanan Bala], you glean the nectar of spring from the woods [...]." As a matter of fact, several poems clubbed Garbo and Kanan Bala together, and the fanfare for both "Tollywood" and Hollywood stars were effectively in same measure, though writings on Garbo's charm, glamour and enigma were far more suggestive.

Chitrapanji published a poem that described Garbo's unparalleled beauty, and pronounced:⁸⁵

your body is full of grace/ the glow of sun is in your eyes, and the luster of moon in your smile/ You are not human, you are a fair-skinned nymph/ I become an eager and aimless lunatic as I look at you.

Such expressions were supported by the eulogisation of her films, like *Queen Christina* and *Mata Hari*,⁸⁶ which apparently made her the "queen of the [film] world." Garbo, in such poems, was generally described as the "ideal woman". The May-June issue of *Chitrapanji*, 1937 (number unavailable), published a poem that recounted the manner in which the narrator, while travelling through a beautiful garden hears young "Shirley" (Temple) who calls out and asks, "would you like to see Greta Garbo and make friends with her?" Garbo, however, at that moment is "busy with her performance" and "her eyes are filled with wonder". Thereafter the author declares how Garbo approached him, even when he was nervous. Temple, nevertheless, assured him that Garbo would never actually get closer. "She will never come closer?" "Then",

the poet enquires, “why did I run to Hollywood? / her large doe-eyes/ are entrenched in my chest, eyes, flesh, and bones.” While Garbo does not come any closer, there are other heroines who apparently approach the narrator, though heroes like Clark Gable, Robert Donat, and others eventually shatter his trance. The same issue of *Chitrapanji* also published an article on Clark Gable, and news about New Theatres’ films like *Mukti*,⁸⁷ *Vidyapati*,⁸⁸ and Sree Bharat Lakshmi Pictures’ *Alibaba*⁸⁹ as well as news regarding Radha Films, G C Talkies, and films produced by other companies, along with reviews of other Bengali films, short stories, screenplays for theatrical performance, and news about Hollywood productions like *The Lost Horizon*,⁹⁰ *The King and the Chorus Girl*,⁹¹ *Marked Woman*⁹² etc.

Likewise, *Chitrapanji* published another poem, also titled “Greta Garbo”, which opens with exclamations such as, “you kissed me in my dreams/ Ah! What a heavenly bliss on earth.”⁹³ Howbeit, the author laments that, this is only a “dream” and “not a reality”; in fact, it’s like a “mirage” in the wasteland. Thereafter, he grieves that, had he not dreamt, and not “ignited this fire of passion,” he would not have been enchanted by the “shadow [chhaya]/ image.” “I want to see the body [kaya],” the author cries, (but) “you smile from a distance like an illusion [maya].” The same issue brought out its regular sections which comprised news regarding the studios and forthcoming films, articles on the life and work of Hollywood (male) stars, publicity images of the film *Rajani*,⁹⁴ as well as its review, a report on “New Theatres’ popularity and its impact,” a note (in English) on the technicalities of the “Cathode-Ray Oscillograph Tube” by the well-known technician Madhu Sil, an advertisement of “Bharat



Figure 15: Garbo



Figure 16: Kanan

Photo-type Studio” endorsed by the famed painter Nandalal Bose, and so on. [See figs. 15 & 16].

The imageries of Garbo’s physical beauty and charm, as well, the descriptions of her as both a “fair-skinned nymph” and “Goddess” provoke us to recall the kind of fan-writings and the purple-prose, which were woven around the Bombay based star—Sulochana (nee Ruby Myers). Also note, images of and articles about Sulochana were plastered on pages of *Filmland*. Sulochana’s persona, to use Neepa Majumdar’s words, could be located at the “intersection of modernity, technology, and fantasies of upward social mobility”, which triggered sexual permissiveness; just as, her films pushed the cultural envelope beyond its boundaries.⁹⁵ Moreover, Sabita Devi’s (Iris Gasper)—the actor of *Aparadhi*—writings (both poems and articles published in *Filmland*) explored the question of “respectability”. While scholars like Majumdar have pointed out how the provocative personas of the Jewish, and Anglo-Indian/ Eurasian female-actors went through processes of transformation during 1930s (especially that of Sulochana through the film *Indira MA*⁹⁶), their bodily presence, and the roles they essayed, underline the growing cosmopolitanism of the period. Despite the fact that, actors like Sabita Devi gradually drifted toward Bombay based productions (to Sagar for instance), or Patience Cooper’s popularity dwindled with the Talkies and in the context of new production systems, one may speculate that the fantasies vis-à-vis the Eurasian stars of the 1920s were transferred on to Garbo’s image during 1930s. *Varieties Weekly* for example, wrote that, “Greta Garbo! Whose eyes epitomise all the attraction that a woman has to offer, voice vibrant and husky with emotion, is the personification of sex appeal.”⁹⁷ Similarly, the July-August issue of *Chitrapanji*, 1936, printed the official addresses of MGM’s stars like Garbo, Clark Gable, Jackie Cooper, Jean Harlow et al, as well as those of Paramount’s stars like Mae West, Marlene Dietrich, Gary Cooper and others, along with United Artists’ actors like Chaplin, Mary Pickford and others, for their “Bengali” fans.⁹⁸ Moreover, the hyphenated expression “Garbo-Kanan”, and the stupendous popularity of their films – like *Queen Christina* and *Mata Hari* as well as *Mukti* and *Vidyapati* – suggest that both the stars portrayed an onscreen persona, which appeared to be modern, strong and liberated. This was expressed not only through their characterisations, but the ways in which they performed, their costumes, gestures, and manner of speaking. For example, Kanan Bala’s role in *Vidyapati*, as the free-spirited Anuradha, was not simply cherished for the songs she rendered, but for the persona itself, and her invigorating physicality, which bestowed an agency to the figure of the woman.

The question of physicality may be further elaborated through a host of other articles published in *Chitrapanji*. *Chitrapanji* for instance, printed a lengthy (and backsliding) retort to the question whether women should dance or not.⁹⁹ This article was triggered by another

lengthy piece published in the previous issue,¹⁰⁰ in which someone named “Chadraseskhar” enquired, “Should [middle-class] women dance or shouldn’t?”, and proposed that only women are capable of answering such questions, and thereafter, demolished the doubt itself. The rejoinder written by another person named “Pulayudh”, in the next issue, insisted that Chadraseskhar didn’t address the differences between acting and dance (though both were performances), and asserted that since women have to look after their homes and children thus, “dance”, which is meant for visual pleasure, cannot be deemed as “physical training”.¹⁰¹ The author wrote:¹⁰²

if a woman moves her arms and legs at her will in her bedroom – that is not a problem since, no one sees this. But, if the same woman dresses up and performs on stage before a group of men, then can’t we men say a word, [and] why should we be punished like this? [...]

The ultimate aim of a woman’s life is to be a wife and a mother; it would be a lie to suggest that she wants to be a dancer or an actor.¹⁰³

The same issue also comprised articles titled “Our actresses”, and “Bengali actresses” and so on. Effectively, by this time dance discourses were a significant part of the larger socio-cultural and ‘women’s question’ debates, which were prompted by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore’s interventions (who also directed New Theatres’ film *Natir Puja* (1932)), eminent performer Uday Shankar’s international projects, and by the performances which Sadhana Bose (the grand-daughter of the distinguished reformer Keshab Chandra Sen), and her husband Modhu Bose, staged.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, *Chitrapanji*, March-April 1936, published an article, penned by the actor Ajuri, which enquired, “why are dancers not appreciated” even though it’s a part of “Indian traditions”, and is performed in the temples.¹⁰⁵ Ajuri narrates how her parents were highly educated (her father was a doctor), and yet, at the time she wanted to learn “dance”, at a very early age, she was discouraged. Later she learnt the art from one of her father’s patients, and eventually her father let her join the field. Ajuri had performed in the film *Sonar Sansar*,¹⁰⁶ which was compared to Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936), in the same issue. The review suggests that, the plots of both the films dealt with subjects of industrialisation, unemployment and the condition of the women. More important, this issue also incorporated a note on the different types of viewers, and urged the audiences to become “critical” and “perceptive” viewers.¹⁰⁷

In reality, critical writing along with fan writings became a forceful signifier of the period. Additionally, preferences for a variety of films become evident through a poem titled “Happiness and Grief” (published in *Chitrapanji*), which disapproved of *Camille*,¹⁰⁸ starring Garbo, and now labeled her as an aging star.¹⁰⁹ The poem was, however, unfavourable toward others films and actors as well, and wondered how *Sonar Sansar* was running in the theatres

for “twenty four weeks”; and insisted that, Sisir Bhaduri’s *A Talkie of Talkies*¹¹⁰ was “all bad”, except for “Sisir himself”. Similarly, both “Didi” (of New Theatres) and “Indira” were supposedly, equally, disappointing; and the only film, which appeared to be enjoyable was Modhu Bose’s *Alibaba* (1937). The poet wrote:

Only Sadhana as Marjina invoked contentment/ with songs, dance, and good [comic or action] timing/ The artist, Modhu [Bose] brought along entertainment for us/ In the theatres, in our films.

Okay, let us not be critical/ let us all watch ‘Alibaba’/ it is advanced [in technique] and likable/ forgive my follies/ Sadhana Bose’s talent is unparalleled.

Despite clearly being a fan-poem of sorts, the poem offers a fair idea about the scope of the field. While *Alibaba* by Hiralal Sen (1902) was effectually the “first” Bengali film (/recorded play) to run in the theatres, the plot of *Alibaba* was already immensely popular, and was adapted by Modhu Bose for stage performances earlier (1934). For the filmed version Bose deployed elaborate orchestration (executed by T. Fritzpolo), and Sadhana Bose choreographed the well-known dance sequences. *Alibaba* was Sree Bharat Lakshmi Productions’ biggest investment till date. While the significance of the film has been underplayed in histories of “Bengali” cinema, *Alibaba* was truly a “phenomenon” considering its multiple adaptations and enduring popularity. Likewise, Modhu Bose in his biography mentioned how the film was regarded as a “first class” film, particularly because of the fashion in which dance was explored within the narrative.¹¹¹ Following the success of *Alibaba*, Sadhana Bose performed in several other “dance” films including Wadia Movietones’ *Court Dancer*¹¹². Nevertheless, by the 1940s, the scene was captured by what I have described elsewhere as “literary” films, as well as what Subhajit Chatterjee reads as “an array of satirical narrative tropes [of social melodramas] having affinities to a certain strand of reflexivity in the modernist ethos, which could be aptly described as a ‘ludic propensity’”. Popular dance form was gradually transformed and shoved out thereafter (though New Theatres did implant Leela Desai’s dances in some of its films like *Vidyapati*); furthermore, much of the physicality of the comic form was progressively altered and often limited to witty dialogues, during the later periods.

Thus, to conclude, this paper not only studies the progression of film-production in Bengal from a somewhat dispersed and ephemeral practice to a far more structured system, with larger capital, technological, and cultural investments, it also draws attention to the popular debates and the divergent public preferences, those which persisted in the public domain and allow us reflect on cinema of the period as a polysemic force. By drawing attention to the shifts and emergent codes I wish to underline the continuities, the mass-acceptance of the comic-mode for example, as well as the ruptures and the break from older modes of

representation. Additionally, this polysemic aspect of the *bazaar*, which transpired from the earlier times into the studio period, may also be traced during the post-partition era (during 1950s-60s), considering the wide circulation of newer types of comedies, thrillers, horrors (despite the expansive debates on realism and cinema especially by the Film Societies) as well as through the renewed comparisons between the enigmatic star Suchitra Sen and Greta Garbo and between Bengali and Hollywood melodramas, which in point of fact, sustained for the next few decades.

Note: All translations of the articles and poems from *Chitrapanji* is by the author. And, all pages of *Chitrapanji* are not numbered; also, the issue number are not evident in all cases.

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Notes

¹ See Madhuja, Mukherjee. *New Theatres Ltd: The Emblem of Art, the Picture of Success*. (Pune: National Film Archive of India, Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2009).

² I am considering the documentary film *Celluloid Man* (Directed by Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, 2012) in which a family member of Irani admits to have sold-off the remaining reels of *Alam Ara* for a paltry sum. The film also shows how even lately, celluloid material were stripped off the silver – and therefore, destroyed -- in Bombay/ Mumbai backyards.

³ Kaushik Bhaumik, *The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry, 1913–1936*. PhD Diss., Oxford University, 2001

⁴ Ranita Chatterjee, *Journeys in and Beyond the City: Cinema in Calcutta 1897-1939*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Westminster, 2011.

⁵ Madhuja, Mukherjee, ed, *Aural Films, Oral Cultures: Essays on Cinema: from the Early Sound Era* (Kolkata: Jadavpur University Press, 2012).

⁶ Erik Barnouw and Subrahmanyam Krishnaswamy, *Indian film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁷ The editorial of *Filmiland* stated that, “ it may sound somewhat strange, but in India, there is no division of labour [...]”. See “Editorial”, *Filmiland* 72, no. 2 (1931): 1-2.

⁸ Douglas Gomery’s seminal work on the “coming of sound” draws attention to the economics of this

transformation vis-à-vis the studios (especially Warner Bros and Fox). Other than debunking Donald Crafton (1999) and others' propositions, Gomery insists in the introduction that, "it was not chaos or disorder" but a rational transition occurring in the "market place". Crafton's reading that the industry appeared like a "noisy bazaar", however, is a pointed argument, which becomes meaningful in the context of arrival of sound in India. See Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986); Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (New York: University of California Press, 1999)

⁹ Also see "Labour", *Cinema City*, <http://projectcinemacity.com/research/labours/>, Accessed on 9th September 2017.

¹⁰ See Tony Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (New York: University of California Press, 1995), 5).

¹¹ See Tejaswini Ganti, *Producing Bollywood: Inside the contemporary Hindi film industry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012) on the persistence of "kinship" industrial structure even in the contemporary setups.

¹² See interviews of eminent directors and producers published in the *Indian Cinematograph Committee Report* (1927-28) on Madan's pervasive control over distribution and exhibition.

¹³ See Madhuja Mukherjee, New Theatres Ltd., and Aural Films, Oral Cultures.

¹⁴ See *The Media Lab*, <http://www.medialabju.org>.

¹⁵ Kaushik Bhaumik, *The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry, 1913-1936*. PhD Diss., Oxford University, 2001, 139-140.

¹⁶ *Filmland* 53, no. 2 (1931): 3.

¹⁷ *Chor-Kantha* (Directed by Charu Roy, 1931).

¹⁸ *Veer Bala* (Directed by Mohan Dayaram Bhavnani, 1925).

¹⁹ *Telephone Girl* (Directed by Homi Master, 1926).

²⁰ *Madame X* (Directed by Lionel Barrymore, 1929)

²¹ *Filmland* 56, no. 2 (1931): 9.

²² Especially see *Sonar Daag* (/ The Golden Mark), Bengali, by Gouranga Prasad Ghosh for an intriguing

narrative of such transitions.

²³ *Swami* (Directed by Charu Roy, 1931)

²⁴ *Filmland* 69, no. 2 (1931)

²⁵ *Filmland* 65, no. 2 (1931).

²⁶ *Filmland* 71, no. 2 (1931): 7.

²⁷ *Varieties Weekly* 1, no. 1 (1931): 15.

²⁸ Also see Sharmishtha Gooptu, *Bengali Cinema: An Other Nation* (London: Routledge, 2011).

²⁹ See reviews of *Shirin Farhad* and *Jore Barat* in *Filmland* 67, no. 2 (1931) and *Filmland* 69, no. 2 (1931).

³⁰ *Film land* 56, no.2 (1931):1.

³¹ *Filmland* 65, no. 2 (1931).

³² *Chasar-Meye* (Directed by Prafulla Roy, 1931).

³³ *Filmland* 74, no. 2 (1931).

³⁴ *Filmland* 65, no. 2 (1931): 11.

³⁵ *Filmland* 67, no. 2 (1931).

³⁶ *Filmland* 71, no. 2 (1931).

³⁷ *Filmland* 88, no. 2 (1931): 9.

³⁸ *Varieties Weekly* 11, no. 1 (1931): 11.

³⁹ *Filmland* 78, no. 2 (1931): 2.

⁴⁰ *Kovalan* (Directed by R.S. Prakash & A. Narayanan, 1929)

⁴¹ *Chandrasena* (Directed by V. Shantaram and Keshavrao Dhaiber, 1931)

⁴² See *Chitrapanji* 3, no. 4 (1934).

⁴³ *Filmland* 69, no. 2 (1931).

⁴⁴ *Filmland* 78, no. 2 (1931).

⁴⁵ *Varieties Weekly* 6, no. 2 (1931).

⁴⁶ *Varieties Weekly* 9, no. 1 (1931): 11.

⁴⁷ *Varieties Weekly* 1, no. 1 (1931).

⁴⁸ *Varieties Weekly* 5, no. 1 (1931).

⁴⁹ *Varieties Weekly* 9, no. 1 (1931): 11.

⁵⁰ This section was introduced in *Varieties Weekly* 5, no. 1 (1931).

⁵¹ See *Varieties Weekly* 4, no. 1 (1931). Also note, Rasool conducted an exclusive interview of Chaplin for *Filmland* 68, no. 2 (1931): 4 & 6.

⁵² *Varieties Weekly* 4, no. 1 (1931): 2.

⁵³ *Varieties Weekly* 5, no. 1(1931): 17.

⁵⁴ *Varieties Weekly* 3, no. 1 (1931): 10 reported that:

Tollyganj [Tollygunge] will probably become Hollywood of Bengal [...] The New Theatres, [sic] studio will be equipped with all the latest improvements [...]the producing hall [studio floor] which is 100' X 50' and 38' high as well as the laboratories on the ground floor on one side [...] The studio will be fitted up to give maximum comfort to the artistes [...].

As well, *Varieties Weekly* 10, no. 1 (1931): 6 mentioned the cosmopolitan culture of New Theatres where “Chinamen” “Sikhs” and people from United Province and Orissa were working in the carpentry and laboratory sections.

⁵⁵ *Filmland* 83, no. 2 (1931): 2, 10 & 17.

⁵⁶ Dhirendranath Ganguli also known as DG, attempted to launch a number of production houses (namely Indo-

British Film Co. and Lotus Film Co.) until he established British Dominion Film Co., where both PC Barua and Devaki Bose were his associates. By the time the British Dominion Film Co., was established DG was immensely popular for his comic style and had acted in and directed films like *England Return* or *Bilet Pherot* (1921). Later, along with Barua and Bose, he joined New Theatres.

⁵⁷ Though *Varieties Weekly* 6, no. 1 (1931): 14 reported that Films of East Ltd. (producer of *Swami*) had already stopped production.

⁵⁸ *Filmland* 83, no. 2 (1931): 24-25.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 28, 29 & 32.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 4-6.

⁶¹ *Filmland* 72, no. 2 (1931): 15.

⁶² *Prem Sanyas* (Directed by Osten and Rai, 1925).

⁶³ *Shiraz* (Directed by Franz Osten, 1928).

⁶⁴ *A Throw of Dice* (Directed by Franz Osten, 1929).

⁶⁵ *Bangalee* (Directed by Charu Roy, 1936).

⁶⁶ *Jamaibabu* (Directed by Kalipada Das, 1931).

⁶⁷ See Madhuja, Mukherjee, "Rethinking popular cinema in Bengal (1930s-1950s): Of literariness, comic mode, mythological and other avatars," *South Asian History and Culture* 8, no. 2 (2017).

⁶⁸ *Filmland* 84, no. 2 (1931): 21.

⁶⁹ A larger history of such forms may be discussed through theatre (like *Sadabar Ekadoshi*, *Buro Sakiler Ghare Rown*, and so on), literature (for example, *Naba Babu Bilas*, *Naba Bibi Bilas*, *Hootum Penchar Noksha*, *Kamala Kanter Daptar* among others), as well as via Gaganendranath Tagore's caricature series, Kalighat Pat paintings, theatre songs, *kheur* (parody) etc.

⁷⁰ *Chandidas* (Directed by Debaki Bose, 1932).

⁷¹ *Devdas* (Directed by P C Barua, 1935).

⁷² See Madhuja Mukherjee, "Early Melodramatic forms and the Subject of Bhakti" in *Religion and Popular Culture in the Indian Subcontinent*, ed. Gopa Gupta, Seema Kundu and Suchishmita Mitra (Kolkata: Bethune College, 2005).

⁷³ *Puran Bhakt* (Directed by Debaki Bose, 1933).

⁷⁴ *Chitrapanji* 6, no. 6 (1936).

⁷⁵ See Madhuja Mukherjee, "Inside a Dark Hall: Space, Place, and Accounts of Some Single-Theatres in Kolkata," *South Asian History and Culture*, <http://dc.doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2017.1304086>, a photo-essay on Calcutta theatres.

⁷⁶ *Seeta* (Directed by Debaki Bose, 1934).

⁷⁷ Manikumar Gangopadhyay, "An aspect of Garbo's character," *Chitrapanji* 7, no. 2 (1934).

⁷⁸ By April 1937 "The Bengal Film Journalist Association" was formed, which was headed by the editor of *Deepali* magazine; the joint secretaries were the editors of *Filmland* and *Chitrapanji*.

⁷⁹ *Queen Cristina* (Directed by. Rouben Mamoulian, 1933).

⁸⁰ *Chitrapanji* 3, no. 4: 1934.

⁸¹ See *Voices of the Talking Stars: Women of Indian Cinema and Beyond*, ed. Madhuja Mukherjee (New Delhi:

Sage, 2017), an edited volume on women's writing and cinema.

⁸² *Chitrapanji* 6, no. 4 (1934).

⁸³ See Sharmistha Gooptu, *Bengali Cinema*.

⁸⁴ Raghunath Kundu, "Our Trio," *Chitrapanji*, 11, no. 6 (1937).

⁸⁵ Birendra Kumar Gupta, "Greta Garbo," *Chitrapanji* 6, no. 6 (1936).

⁸⁶ *Maya Hari* (Directed by George Fitzmaurice, 1931).

⁸⁷ *Mukti* (Directed by P C Barua, 1937).

⁸⁸ *Debaki* (Directed by Debaki Bose, 1938).

⁸⁹ *Alibaba* (Directed by Modhu Bose, 1937).

⁹⁰ *The Lost Horizon* (Directed by Frank Capra, 1937)

⁹¹ *The King and the Chorus Girl* (Directed by Marvyn LeRoy, 1937)

⁹² *Marked Woman* (Directed by Llyod Bacon, Michael Curtiz, 1937).

⁹³ Nabakumar Mukhopadhyay, "Greta Garbo," *Chitrapanji* 11, no. 5 (1936).

⁹⁴ *Rajini* (Directed by Jyotish Bandyopadhyay, 1936).

⁹⁵ Neepa Majumdar, *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only! Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s-1950s* (New York: University of Illinois Press, 2010): 94.

⁹⁶ *Indira MA* (Directed by Nandlal Jaswantlal, 1934)

⁹⁷ *Varieties Weekly* 3, no. 1 (1931): 6.

⁹⁸ *Chitrapanji* 10, no. 5 (1936): 526.

⁹⁹ *Chitrapanji* 11, no. 5 (1936)

¹⁰⁰ *Chitrapanji* 10, no. 5 (1936).

¹⁰¹ Note, such names were often pseudo-names.

¹⁰² *Chitrapanji* 11, no. 5 (1936): 535.

¹⁰³ On the contrary, many women, including Sita Devi, insisted that they wanted to be "actresses", and enjoyed performing. It was also rumoured that Sita Devi moved to Hollywood in an attempt to pursue a new career. Also see: <http://kindlemag.in/cinemawali-3-sita-aur-rainey/>

¹⁰⁴ See Pritha Chakrabarti, "Performing the region: Sadhona Bose and the modern Bengali film dance," *South Asian History and Culture* 8, no. 2 (2017): 155-170.

¹⁰⁵ *Chitrapanji* 6, no. 6 (1936).

¹⁰⁶ *Sonar Sansar* (Directed by Debaki Bose, 1936)

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 320-322.

¹⁰⁸ *Camille* (Directed by George Cukor, 1936).

¹⁰⁹ Girija Kumar Basu, "Happiness and Grief," *Chitrapanji* 7, no. 6 (1937).

¹¹⁰ *Talkie of Talkies* (Directed by Sisir Kumar Bhaduri, 1937).

¹¹¹ See Modhu Bose biography (*Aamar Jeeban/ my life*) republished in 2012.

¹¹² *Court Dancer* (Directed by Modhu Bose, 1941).