



The Discernible Breakthrough In Bengali Cinema After Independence In 1947: An Analysis In Retrospect

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The present paper seeks to establish that it was only after India's Independence in 1947 that Bengali cinema entered an altogether new era of moving into uncharted waters, having made a significant departure from its earlier nature and trends that prevailed during its existence over a total span of 28 years prior to 1947. Further more it would like to argue that this departure was largely engineered by the aftermath of the partition that was incidentally intertwined with India's Independence. Since 1919 when Bengali cinema was born, it was characterized by ingredients within confines of only mythological and devotional plots or classic novels and stories/comedies of Bengali literature in general. But since our Independence in 1947, paradigm shifts in emphasis and features of Bengali cinema became discernible. Of particular significance, it was the dynamics of the post-Independence West Bengal's socio-economic challenges and pressures posed by the partition, which brought in its wake prominently new waves of widening thoughts strong enough to induce these paradigm shifts of Bengali cinema in its contents, emphasis and presentation. Against this backdrop, the present paper makes a humble attempt to articulate and analyze the various aspects of the post-Independence changes in Bengali film making. The analysis is completed in terms of three distinct sections. Section One deals with the gravity of the dismal situation in West Bengal that followed the refugee influx since 1947 and focuses on the resulting socio-economic atmosphere inducing new trends in Bengali literature, drama and music in West Bengal, which, in turn, left a powerful reflection on Bengali cinema. Section Two takes up the task to probe into identifying the variety of the aspects relating to the new trends and shifts noticed in Bengali film making during the first two decades of Independence. Section Three, finally, sums up the important findings and presents the concluding observations.

I

Since the paper rests on the hypothesis that social upheavals and turmoils which may arise from major political events no less than the partition of a country can exert a strong and long-term influence on its socio-cultural aspects like literature, drama, music and film making, the starting point of our probe into the stated task is necessarily the context of India's partition and its far-reaching repercussions. The political event of India's Independence in 1947, intertwined with her accompanying partition unfortunately inflicted on her rather with a mysterious abruptness by a hostile and quitting foreign ruler, taking full advantage of the conflicting urges and views of the freedom fighting leaders of undivided India on key issues and their last-minute haste amidst ongoing communal riots prior to the abnegation of political power by the British in 1947 after a two-hundred-year-long colonial rule here, undoubtedly generated a grisly outbreak of an appalling atmosphere in the country. The result that ensued proved to be quite trying and challenging for India, especially for her domestic economy. The challenges were embodied in a substantial loss of territory along with the resulting loss of minerals possessing regions in the western parts along with a massive loss of jute growing areas in the east, over and above an exceedingly large influx of refugees from both sides. The latter turned to be ghoulish with its resulting pressure on food situation and an inevitable incidence of increased unemployment. However, in particular, for the newborn state of West Bengal, emerging as an essential outcome of the partition, it entailed a direct and immediate brunt with even tougher and more menacing challenges on her society and economy, with threats arising from a chain of overawing range of



newly emerging perils and lurid circumstances to combat. As gruesome consequences, a mammoth influx of refugees in West Bengal brought in its wake untold misery and woes for the destitute refugees plunged abruptly into inordinate anxiety in an unknown land coupled with a distressing state of living and food availability, health, housing and sanitation, resulting in their increased vulnerability to serious diseases, save their immediate access to education or other minimum amenities of human existence. A vast number of the able individuals among these helpless refugees having failed to eke out a living quickly became a matter of concern as a potential threat of social imbalances. It thus changed the very nature of the region's sociological fabric in a measure enough to unsettle the even keel of the society and the socio-cultural harmony. In this context, one can hardly ignore to note a contemporary and significantly powerful development that arose as a sequel to the aforesaid adverse repercussions on West Bengal's society at large. This emerging aspect became markedly discernible in the form of certain prominently new cultural trends that began to surface in West Bengal. These trends were sharply reflected as changes and shifts in the nature and emphasis of Bengali literature, drama and music with a concomitant influence and sharp reflection on Bengali cinema during the 1950s and 1960s. It is this backdrop, against which the present paper seeks to articulate and analyse the post-Independence changes in Bengali cinema in particular.

As is well known, the partition had actually occurred amidst an already prevalent vicious atmosphere characterized by tensions of the freedom struggle coupled with frequent communal riots, over and above a variety of disastrous economic consequences of the Second World War, including acute food shortage, inflation and unemployment. The ills had already started being unleashed by this War upon contemporary India under British colonial rule and on many other densely populated capital-poor countries in Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia, many of them in Africa having remained as colonies of major European powers since the beginning of Neo Imperialism in 1869 onward. All of these colonies including India, after having attained Independence from the prolonged exploitation of their respective colonial masters in the late 1940s in a quick succession, and constituting what is called the Third World countries, faced the immediate urgency of fighting poverty. Thus, the apparent notoriety that the partition actually entailed for India in general and West Bengal in particular was several fold the notoriety that would have otherwise appeared in the absolute absence of the Second World War altogether. With this background, the brunt of refugee influx was more heavily felt in West Bengal for valid reasons amply explained in this paper. While the influx to the newborn Indian state of Punjab happened to be mostly a one-time event of 1947 or at the best continued for another year, the refugee influx into West Bengal continued for years to roll on regularly for as long as two decades and even beyond. During the first 23 years of the partition up to 1970, there was an exodus of 52.83 lakhs people from East Pakistan to India as refugees. Since the government was not at all in any kind of preparedness whatsoever for this suddenly occurring series of refugee influx and that too in continuous waves of massive magnitudes, the distress of the refugees in West Bengal was magnified several folds. These uprooted people badly in need of shelters in West Bengal began to settle wherever they found it possible to do, and in reality they mostly settled in vested lands, including even in swamplands. A small section was rehabilitated to Dandakaranya in Chattisgarh, but the bulk remained in West Bengal.

It must not be forgotten that this abrupt and an alarmingly colossal influx of destitute refugees from the newly created foreign land of East Pakistan occurred under frightfully compulsive circumstances. They along with their families, children and near ones including many sick members and pregnant mothers in the families left their home and other immovables in bare hands and in one attire in an utterly penniless condition, and many people even fled leaving their government or private jobs behind. This dire situation warranted their instant rehabilitation. By the same token, the refugee influx aggravated the State's already prevailing food crisis of a chronic nature. The calamity was heightened by a worsening of the region's housing and sanitation problems of the period in its urban and suburban areas and an emerging pressure of

disbalance on the State's medical infrastructure. The increased misery and rampant joblessness among the newly settled refugees here alongside a general scarcity all around was coupled with a whole host of other social ills, imbalances and restlessness that were incidentally associated with the dreary scenario obtaining. Thus the overall impact of the partition in West Bengal was undoubtedly multidimensional. The hardship became magnified by the jobless refugees all around. The onset of these new shocks brought in its wake marked changes and shifts in emphasis and contents in Bengali cinema by way of inducting far-reaching changes in the socio-cultural scenario in West Bengal including, in particular, in the arenas of education, literature, music and songs. The changes in literature, as analysed in the later parts of the following section, had a specially mighty influence.

II

The post-Independence departure of Bengali cinema during the 1950s and the 1960s becomes unmistakably clear once we look back at the nature of Bengali cinema during the four decades prior to the country's Independence in 1947. As is well known, Bengali cinema began its journey in the form of silent films that had total absence of any sound. As such, the cast had to rely mostly on physical expressions as there was no scope for any audible talk. This silent era of Bengali cinema lasted for nearly two decades up to 1931, mainly remaining concerned with production of devotional films, comedies and films based on classics of Bengali literature. Although at the very beginning of this silent phase, Bengali cinema turned out only documentaries and short films, it saw in November 1919 the appearance of the first silent feature film in Bengali, namely, *Bilwamangal*, produced by Jamshedji Framji Madan of the Madan Theatre Company and directed by Rustomji Dhotiwala. The film, based on the medieval Bhakti poet Bilwamangal, was essentially devotional in character. Incidentally, and curiously enough to ponder, it was a time when Gandhiji, having already attained popularity as a rising star in the stage of Indian politics after his Jalianwalabagh protests preceded by his three earlier Satyagrahas at Champaran, Ahmedabad and Kheda and after his active support to the then budding Khilafat movement for incorporating the latter in his Non-cooperation movement to follow shortly, was just making his appearance as a significantly prominent national figure in our struggle for independence, that Bengali cinema saw the birth of its first silent feature film *Bilwamangal*.

However, as already stated, the trend of silent drama films continued for Bengali cinema throughout the 1920s as well. The film *BiletPherat* by DhirendranathGanguly, the father of Bengali cinema, was a Bengali comedy feature film released in 1921. Incidentally, many of the silent Bengali films of the 1920s were drawn from the Bengali classics including short stories, comedies and love stories. To name a few, there were cinemas like *Andhare Alo* of Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, *Balidan* based on the play 'Bisarjan' and *Giribala* based on the short story 'Manbhanjan' of Rabindranath Tagore. The frontline actors and actresses of the 1920s were Pramathesh Barua, Kanan Devi, Sisir Bhaduri, Fatma Begum, Dhirendra Nath Ganguly, Sushilabala, Dhiraj Bhattacharya and Tinkari Chakraborty.

Coming to 1931, we see there was another Bengali comedy silent film *Jamai Babu* produced by Kalipada Das. However, the 1930s witnessed the attainment of a milestone in Bengali cinema with the appearance of the first Bengali talkie film *Jamai Shashthi* in 1931. Its director was Amar Choudhury. But in spite of being the first Bengali talkie film, it lacked the status of a feature film because it was merely a short film. The audience had to wait till December 1931 to witness the first appearance of a talkie feature film in Bengali cinema under the title *Dena Paona*. This pioneering Bengali talkie feature film, directed by Prem Kumar Atarhi, was based on Saratchandra's classic creation 'Dena Paona'. The film was revolutionary for Bengali cinema as it marked the beginning of synchronised sound recording that enabled the hitherto unable cinema audience to

henceforth both listen and watch the acting. However, the Bengali cinema of the 1930s continued to hover around mythological and devotional literature and the Bengali classics of Bankimchandra, Tagore and Saratchandra. Some of the devotional films of this decade were *Rajrani Meera*, *Vidyapati* and *Chandidas*. The noted films of the 1930s based on traditional Bengali literature included *Kapal Kundala*, *Gora*, *Chokher Bali*, *Palli Samaj*, *Devdas* and *Grihadaha*. The eminent directors of the decade were Pramathesh Barua and Debaki Bose. Another luminary in the sphere of Bengali cinema of this period was Mukul Bose who brought about revolutionary changes in the art of sound recording in Bengali film. The names of K.L. Saigal and Kanan Devi deserve a special mention as frontline film singers of the decade. Above all, talented musicians and singers including Pankaj Mullick, Rai Chand Boral and Krishna Chandra Dey took the Bengali cinema of the 1930s to greater heights. Playback singing marked a significant addition to Bengali cinema achieved by Nitin Bose in his film *Bhagya Chakra* in 1935. His other creations included *Didi* in 1937, *Jiban Maran* in 1938 and *Deshar Mati* in 1938. The feature film *Bidyapati* by Debaki Bose in 1937 turned gorgeous with a stunning performance of its lead actress Kanan Devi. Of significance, K.L. Saigal emerged as a superstar singer with big hits like *Didi* and *Street Singer* (1940). The leading cinema stars of the 1930s were Pramathesh Barua, Kanan Devi, Ahindra Choudhuri, Durgadas Bannerjee, Jahar Ganguly, Chhabi Biswas, Pahari Sanyal, Chhaya Devi, Molina Devi, Tinkari Chakrabarti, Bhanu Bandopadhyay and Chandrati Devi.

The decade of the 1940s brought about a change in the style of acting in Bengali cinema, showing a gradual shift from theatrical to cinematic art. It goes without saying that the Calcutta streets since the onset of the decade of the 1940s began to constitute frequent scenes of commotion and insurrection with a continuous flow of national protests like the Quit India Movement of 1942 as part of the freedom struggle. Apart from the growing unrest of the freedom struggle, a series of luring and sulky developments in Bengal, like the distressing famine in 1943, the protests against the arrest of the INA personnel and the Calcutta riots in 1946 began to leave some perceptible impact on the contents of the Bengali films produced in the 1940s. There was a clear evidence of departure from the earlier films based on devotional themes and elements of traditional literature. However, most of the filmstars of the 30s continued in the 40s as well, with the significant addition of some new talents including Asit Baran, Jahar Roy and Uttam Kumar. Uttam Kumar first appeared in Bengali cinema in Nitin Bose's *Drishtidan* (1948), though he met with success much later since 1952 with his appearance in Nirmal Dey's film *Basu Paribar*. However, the fact remains that Bengali cinema of the 1940s started moving towards a new direction of social realism. The film *Doctor* (1940) by Phani Majumdar and Subodh Mitra, *Shesh Uttar* (1942) by Pramathesh Barua and next *Udayer Pathe* (1944) by Bimal Roy were significant pathfinders in this direction. The films in general began to be more concerned with promoting greater awareness among the public regarding the burning issues of the society, economy and polity.

But coming to 1947, the Bengali cinema underwent sea changes under the influence of the socio-economic shocks of the partition that accompanied Independence. From this period onward, Bengali cinema was influenced by three related factors: first, the socio-economic shocks of the partition; secondly, new trends in post-partition Bengali literature including drama; and, thirdly, a parallel cinema movement under Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen and Tapan Sinha coupled with a simultaneous twist in romantic films mainly nourished by the lead pair of Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen, and some other talented actors and actresses, as analysed below in steps.

First of all, the challenges and shocks yielded by the partition as analysed already impacted the contemporary Bengali literature which in turn proved to be a powerful influencing factor on the Bengali cinema of the next two decades. The partition brought in its wake marked changes and shifts in the socio-

cultural scenario of West Bengal including, in particular, in the arenas of education, literature, music and songs. Contemporary Bengali literature began to exert a strong influence on Bengali cinema of the time by way of capturing in a big way the socio-cultural and political background of the time. Quite expectedly, post Independence Bengali cinema derived great inspiration from the contemporary Bengali literature. During this period, the Bengali novels and modern poetry underwent a new mould. The major contents of the Bengali novels after the partition were social realism of the post-partition narratives focusing on the untold miseries of the refugees, feminist thoughts and themes, issues of abject poverty and distress of the marginalised groups. There was an unmistakably discernible stamp of leftist perceptions and thoughts in many of the contemporary novels. The noted Bengali writers and novelists of the post-partition period of the 1950s and the 1960s were Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay, Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, Manik Bandyopadhyay, Ashapoorna Devi and Buddhadev Bose. Other heavyweights in the realm of Bengali novels of the post-partition era were Sunil Gangopadhyay, Samaresh Majumdar, Mahasweta Devi, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay and Samaresh Basu. Of great significance, Bengali drama in its theatrical form also changed greatly with the origin of what came to be called group theatre led by luminaries like Sombhu Mitra, Tripti Mitra, Utpal Dutta and later Rudraprasad Sengupta. It was rather a movement that became instrumental in upholding social realism by way of using the plays as means to address the various socio-political issues of the time. Presence of social realism was also noticed in Bengali commercial theatre. Moreover, the newly emerging perspectives and thoughts in this period were equally reflected in the Bengali poems as well. The poems of this era reflected on themes including the trauma of displacement, loss of identity, and the pain of leaving homeland. The noted poets of the period were Sukanta Bhattacharya, Bishnu Dey, Jibanananda Das, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Shankha Ghosh, Sudhindranath Dutta, Sunil Gangopadhyay and Nirendra Nath Chakrabarti. The moot point that must not be missed out in this connection is that Bengali cinema from the very beginning of this era received rich insights from the emerging trends in post-partition Bengali culture. As a matter of fact, Bengali cinema of the 1950s and the 1960s displayed a silent but powerful interaction with Bengali literature including its novels, essays, dramas and poems. In some way or other and by no less amount, it had also a silent interaction with the contemporary Bengali theatre as well, because a good number of actors and actresses in both fields were glaringly common.

It is now amply clear from the preceding analysis that the partition of 1947 came to occupy a place of special significance as a divider in Bengali culture. There were major developments in the cultural atmosphere that went a long way in influencing the post-partition Bengali cinema. Incidentally, the post-Independence Calcutta saw the appearance of a group of Bengali intellectuals led by Satyajit Ray and some of his friends including Bansi Chandra Gupta and Chidananda Dasgupta, whose serious endeavour led to the formation of the The Calcutta Film Society in October 1947. Inspired by the cine clubs of Paris, it aimed at producing goods films under what was called New Wave Cinema. It also wanted to promote a wider and healthier viewership of good films of both regional and international categories. Incidentally, the process of the departure of Bengali cinema since Independence worked to progress very steadily over the next two decades through the 1950s and 1960s to constitute.

More specifically, the growth of Bengali cinema during this period came in two forms: first, the aforesaid New Wave Cinema, also called the Parallel Cinema Movement emphasizing social issues in the form of production of partition narratives by Nemai Ghosh and Ritwik Ghatak along with art films of Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Tapan Sinha, on the one hand, and, secondly, a newly emerging variety of commercial films basically hinging on romance and reality aspects of life, as produced under the sincere efforts of talented directors to be elaborated later.

As regards the first form, namely, the Parallel Cinema Movement, it made its beginning in the early 1950s. It deviated significantly from the mainstream commercial cinema hitherto encouraged and came to emphasise the realities of life, social issues and artistic expressions of the details of nature and of humans. The key figures of the Parallel Cinema Movement being Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Tapan Sinha, Ritwik Ghatak and Nemai Ghosh need to be highlighted more elaborately as under.

Satyajit Ray emerged as an astounding figure or rather as a prodigious talent in cinema production. His *Pather Panchali* (1955), *Aparajito* (1956) and *Apur Sansar* (1959) constituted a landmark in Bengali cinema and for that matter these carved out a place of pride for Indian cinema in the arena of international cinema. His maiden film, namely, *Pather Panchali* (1955), was a masterpiece that earned him wide international recognition. This was equally well recognised at the Cannes Film Festival in 1956. Satyajit Ray's novelty features were his realistic portrayal of life, character development with finer and delicate details of nature and human characters and his brilliantly innovative use of sound and camera techniques. These things were never seen before in our Bengali cinema up to the 1940s. He had many other immortal creations that include *Jalsaghar* (1958), *Devi* (1960), *TinKanya* (1961), *Kanchenjunga* (1962), *Mahanagar* (1963), *Nayak* (1966), *Chiriakhana* (1967), *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (1969), *Aranyer Din Ratri* (1970), *Seemabaddha* (1971), *Sonar Kella* (1974), *Joi Baba Felunath* (1979), *Ganashatru* (1989), *ShakhaProshakha* (1990) and *Agantuk* (1991). His *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* as an anti war fantasy adventure comedy film which was based on a children story by his grandfather Upendrakishore Raychowdhury had a world-wide reception, earning him a series of national and international film awards. As a sequel to this film, he produced another one, namely, *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (1980) which was also widely received.

The other prominent cinema personality appearing in the 1950s was Mrinal Sen. He was equally noted for his active participation in the Parallel Cinema Movement. His masterpiece films included *Raat Bhore* (1955), *Neel Akasher Niche* (1959), *Bhuban Shome* (1969), *Interview* (1971), *Kolkata 71* (1972), *Chorus* (1973), *Mrigaya* (1974) and *Ek Din Pratidin* (1976). His films dealt with the complications of daily life of the middle class Bengalees and also focused on the various contemporary social issues including the lives of the deprived and marginalized communities. He laid a special emphasis on the issues of social and political realism of his past and immediate present. For instance, in some of his productions, he upheld vividly the aspects of the Bengal famine of 1943 (*Akaler Sandhane*) and the Naxalite movement (*Kolkata 71*). His contributions to sound and camera innovations were also exemplary.

The other leading luminary of the post-partition Bengali cinema production was Tapan Sinha. He is noted for mixing art and aesthetic design with commercial film. It was undoubtedly a marvellous novelty in Bengali cinema that earned him high commercial success. He explored diverse aspects of human characters in his films where music and camera played a significant role. Moreover, in several films he adapted from Tagore's classics, as he did in *Kabuliwala* (1957), *KshudhitaPashan* (1960) and *Atithi* (1965). This evinced his profound love for the heritage of Bengali literature as well. Apart from the aforesaid three, some of his other noted Bengali films were *Jhinder Bandi* (1961), *Jatugriha* (1964), *Aarohi* (1964), *Galpo Holey Satyi* (1966), *Hatey Bajarey* (1967), *Apanjan* (1968), *Sagina Mahato* (1970), *Ekhoni* (1971), *Harmonium* (1976) and *Banchharamer Bagan* (1980). To many Bengali film critics and lovers, Tapan Sinha is regarded as the only director to blend art and entertainment with exceptional success.

As mentioned earlier briefly, the leading post-partition film makers upholding partition narratives and vividly projecting the woes of the victims as refugees were Nemai Ghosh and Ritwik Ghatak. The film *Chhinnamul* (1950) by Nemai Ghosh was the first Bengali film that focused on the partition of 1947 and

highlighted the distress of a group of farmers who were forced to leave their homeland in East Bengal to settle in West Bengal after the partition. It was a film based on a book authored by Swarnakamal Bhattacharya and was starred by Gangapada Basu, Ritwik Ghatak and Shova Sen. The film highly impressed a Russian film director who arranged for showing the film in as many as 188 theatres in Soviet Russia. The other Bengali film director emphasising post-partition narratives and contemporary socio-political realities with his unique cinematic artistry was Ritwik Ghatak. Three of his classics delving into the painful consequences of the partition are *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Komal Gandhar* (1961) and *Subarnarekha* (1962, released in 1965), which are collectively known as his Partition Trilogy. Some other notable films of Ritwik Ghatak are *Nagarik* (1952), *Ajantrik* (1958), *Bari ThekePaliye* (1959), *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* (1973) and *Jukti Takko ArGappo* (1974).

At the other extreme, there were the well-known commercial films of the 1950s and the 1960s. Although a majority of these films were romantic films aimed at entertainment of the mass in a big way, these films also touched upon the varied aspects of the ups and downs and the struggles of life. In short these films focused on the complexities of human characters, and on the possible hurdles in relationships among humans in general and the challenges in romance in particular. The middle class Bengalees at large and those suffering the wrath of the partition of 1947 in particular and especially the women folk in these groups loved to forget about the hard reality of the daily hazards of family problems and crisis by way of spending a couple of hours in the afternoon to remain absorbed in the newly emerging romantic films of the 1950s and 1960s. These films were more often than not based on a rich reserve of Bengali novels of the period. The romantic films starred by the lead pair of the age, namely, Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen came to win the minds of the audience of Bengali cinema from the very first such film, namely, *Sare Chuattar* (1953) down to *Nabarag* (1971). The Uttam-Suchitra films in general had romantic storylines, often displaying a wide range of emotions from tenderness and joy to heartbreaking despair within the constraints of societal rigidities and complexities of societal expectations. Some of the marvellously sensational films of this glamorous pair were *Sharey Chuattar* (1953), *Agni Pariksha* (1954), *Shap Mochan* (1955), *Sagarika* (1956), *Chandranath* (1957), *Harano Sur* (1957), *PatheyHolo Deri* (1957), *Rajlakshmi O Sreekanta* (1958), *Indrani* (1958), *Chaoa Paoa* (1959), *Deep Jweley Jai* (1959), *Saptapadi* (1961), *Bipasha* (1962), *Uttar Phalguni* (1963), *Sat Pake Bandha* (1963), *Grihadaha* (1967), *Kamallata* (1969) and *Nabarag* (1971). Other notable commercial and entertainment films of the 1950s and 1960s, to name a few, were *Adarsha Hindu Hotel*, *Basu Paribar*, *Bhanu Pelo Lottery*, *Parashpathar*, *Nilachale Mahaprabhu*, *Bicharak*, *Datta*, *Ekti Rat*, *Hanabari*, *Indranath-Sreekanta-O-Annadadidi*, *JamalayeJibanta Manush*, *Sabar Uparey*, *Trijama*, *Badsha*, *Lukochuri*, *Maraner Pare*, *Nastaneer*, *Saheb Bibi Golam*, *Shankar Narayan Bank*, *Deya Neya*, *Antony Firingi*, *Chowranghee*, *Nayak*, and *Sanyasi Raja*. The directors of these romantic and commercial films were the Agradoot group, Modhu Bose, Ajay Kar, Bimal Roy, Arabinda Mukhopadhyay, Tarun Majumdar, Salin Sen, Dinen Gupta, Nabendu Ghosh, Asit Sen, Nabyendu Chatterjee and the Agragami group led by Nisith Banerjea. As regards the actors and actresses of the era, the names of Uttam Kumar, Suchitra Sen and Soumitra Chattopadhyay were the uppermost. But it must be admitted that a host of other talents also enriched Bengali cinema of this period in a big way. Among these renowned actors were Chhabi Biswas, Tulsi Chakraborty, Gangapada Basu, Pahari Sanyal, Bikash Roy, Biswajit Chattopadhyay, Tarun Kumar, Basanta Chowdhury, Anil Chatterjee, Kali Banerjee, Kamal Mitra and Utpal Dutta. It would be a grave error in this context to omit the names of some other figures of genius like Bhanu Bandyopadhyay, Anup Kumar, Manu Mukherjee, Satya Banerjee, Satya Bandyopadhyay, Kamu Mukherjee, Nimu Bhowmick, Haradhan Bannerjee, Haridhan Mukherjee, Jahar Roy, Rabi Ghosh, Mithun Chakraborty, Ranjit Mallick and Chinmay Roy. The leading actresses of the period in reference included Sabitri Chattopadhyay, Sumitra Devi, Madhabi Mukherjee, Arundhuti Devi, Kajal Gupta,

Molina Devi, Chhaya Devi, Geeta Dey, Sandhya Devi, Sandhya Roy, Sharmila Tagore and Supriya Chattopadhyay. Some other illustrious cinema talents of the age were Kaberi Bose, Lily Chakraborty, Tanuja Samartha, Sumita Sanyal, Anjana Bhowmick, Nandini Maliya, Aparna Sen, Sumitra Mukhopadhyay and Mousumi Chattopadhyay.

III

Bengali cinema was born in the 1910s as short films in mute form and since 1919 it began its humble beginning as mute feature films. It progressed throughout the 1920s as mute feature films, remaining confined within mythological/devotional plots and some within the classics of Bengali literature. The 1930s however saw an important leap in that the mute films came to be replaced by talkies for the first time in 1931. But despite that fact that 1930s became more chequered with unprecedented unrest of the Civil Disobedience Movement and some major ups and downs in the country's freedom struggle, the films of the 30s continued to remain hovering around the devotional and classical contents alone, with minor exceptions of occasional comedies. Some change of emphasis in contents of the Bengali films became noticeable for the first time in the more turbulent 1940s. But the change became phenomenal or rather revolutionary only since the country's Independence in 1947. There is no gainsaying the fact that the distressing post-partition economic atmosphere arising from the refugee influx and the concomitant socio-cultural changes provided a notably powerful background to induce remarkably new trends in Bengali literature and culture. This had, in turn, led to a massive impact on the cinema of post Independence West Bengal, especially during the first 25 years of the Independence, as analysed above. Bengali cinema during the period underwent a series of far-reaching changes in contents, emphasis, perspectives and technology. The changes were so qualitative and so fundamental that nothing short of the term revolution can adequately describe the phenomenon. It is for this reason that Bengali cinema since Independence up to the mid-1970s is called the Golden era of Bengali cinema. It touched upon every walk of life of the Bengalees belonging to all age groups and thereby it was able to reach the inner core of the mind of a wider audience. The changes are considered highly important as those left a powerful impact on the soul and spirit of the Bengalees at large and exerted a marked influence both on their social life and on their personal lives and attitudes. It thus invariably left a mighty impression on them as individuals belonging to all spheres of life, resulting in a mutually interactive dynamics that essentially worked on the society in a harmonious way.

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