The Clandestine Cinema of Bengal: Genesis, Evolution and Praxis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will investigate and analyse the evolution of a dissident Bengali cinema since the 2010s taking into consideration three filmmakers, Q, Pradipta Bhattacharyya and Aditya Vikram Sengupta. The films that these filmmakers make are deeply political where politics is regarded less around formal experimentation but around the structures of production, living up to Godard's famous adage "*not to make political films, but to make films politically"* (Hoberman, 2005). The thesis aims at investigating the rise of this "*Clandestine Cinema"* through its social, political, and aesthetic contexts. The research takes into account class relations and class struggles as a vector in (cinematic) production.

Bengali cinema post-independence evolved with ideologies based on socialist and progressive discourses which influenced the aesthetics of realism till the end of 1970s. The formation of new social relations due to expropriation and depopulation of the land since late 1970s had profound effects. With rising unemployment and disintegration of the proletariat into the class of the lumpenproletariat, marginalization and disenfranchisement became the social realties. This paved the way for a new lumpen aesthetics which distinguished itself from realism. This study investigates these social relations and subsequent changes in aesthetics.

By the beginning of new millennium, neoliberal strategies and the rise of Hindutva caused further fragmentation of social relations which affected the production, distribution, and exhibition of Bengali cinema through deepening corporatization and control of discourse. The presence and practices of clandestine filmmaking are ignored and obscured. The concept of the clandestine will be examined through the exploitation of the productive class which have evolved historically, and how exploitation have led to the contemporary politics of alienation. This narrative of alienation creates a crisis which has deterred

experimentation and the creation of new cinematic voices, a paradigm which was native and profound to the cinematic tradition of Bengal since independence. The films of the clandestine dramatize contemporary social relations and class struggles. But the Clandestine is not only a narrative of alienation, it also a story of struggle: struggle which subverts these forces of alienation.

Statement of the Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled "The Clandestine Cinema of Bengal: Genesis, Evolution, and Praxis" has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research, and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Rajdeep Roy

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Chapter 1   INTRODUCTION

Men do not make history under self-selected circumstances but under circumstances

existing already, given and transmitted from the past. — Karl Marx

(The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte)

Bengali cinema post-independence was a case study for successfully imbricating the interests of art and commerce for a sustained period in Indian cinema. The popular dominant cinema of Uttam Kumar-Suchitra Sen[1] coexisted successfully with independent and 'parallel' cinemas of Mrinal Sen, Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak creating a distinctively unique Bengali cinema. The inherent language that Bengali cinema created was vastly different from the cinemas in the rest of the nation. However, film critic Chidananda Dasgupta states that the regional cinemas (Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Punjabi, etc.) of India "duplicates the mass-produced film formula" (Gooptu, 2011, p. 1) pioneered by the Indian Hindi cinema post the second World War. Film academic Sharmishta Gooptu argues with Dasgupta to claim that the cinema of Bengal post-independence was culturally "exclusive and aesthetically distinct" (Gooptu, 2011, p. 4) from the rest of India, i.e., it was not merely "duplicating" the formula of Hindi film production.

However, since the beginning of 1980s, there was an overall slump in the quality of Bengali cinema which proceeded for almost three decades. Anugyan Nag and Spandan

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[1] Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen were the most celebrated lead pair in the golden age of Bengali cinema which lasted over two decades starting from the late 1950s. Together they appeared in several films including *Saptapadi*, *Uttar Falguni*, etc which were great commercial successes and beloved by audiences.

Bhattacharya while analysing the cinemas of Bengal during the 1980s asserts that its aesthetics were "vulgar" and "crude" (Nag & Bhattacharya, 2011, p. 18). The primary driving force of the films produced post the 80s had the sole objective function of profit maximization which treated these films as fungible commodities. But by the end of the first decade of the new millennium, there is evidence of the rise of a new cinematic movement in Bengal which I am calling *Clandestine Cinema*.

The 'distinctiveness' of Bengali cinema which Sharmishta Goopto argues above was not due to Bengali exceptionalism thus to a reification of Bengali culture. It is the result of contestations in social relations in Bengal post-independence. The social relations were structured around the progressive ideologies of a new India after two centuries of oppression from the British empire, land reforms, industrialisation, and urbanisation. The decline of Bengali cinema from the 1980s can also be similarly analysed through the material relations in Bengal. I will analyse both the cinemas from these periods and explore the reason for their rise, decline and finally evolution into a new cinematic language in context to the changing material relations.

This thesis then examines a unique cinematic movement in Bengal post 2010, with films that I consider culturally and aesthetically inimitable. The unique nature of this movement is that it is self-aware of the components of the social reality of Bengal and India particularly the worsening social conditions in Bengal. While the dominant cinema has always provided an escape from the social realities of contemporary times, the clandestine, on the contrary, embraces them to project a new cinematic reality. I name this movement as '*clandestine*' as the films that I associate with this movement are always covered by a veil of secrecy which is cast by the forces of dominant cinema. By the forces of the dominant cinema, I mean an institution of filmmakers, producers, distribution channels, media outlets and cine federations which controls and influences the production of dominant cinema of contemporary Bengal. For

over a decade now there has been a vengeful attempt of suppressing certain kinds of films by deterring them from distribution channels, exhibition and even sometimes by vandalising production of the films. So, even though the clandestine films are artistically bold and according to some critics 'fresh in aesthetic' (Walsh, 2014) they only reach a certain section of the population, mostly disaffected youth. Supressing these films into the shadows by the forces of dominant cinema, which produces a range of interesting effects that makes the case of the clandestine unique and thus worthy of investigation.

The filmmakers of clandestine cinema provide an uncompromising view of the contemporary moment. Over the years these films have also depicted a pattern of filmmaking which confronts the dominant forces controlling the Bengali film industry. However, a performance of secrecy is always maintained in the mainstream as if these films and filmmakers do not exist. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the social, cultural, economic, and political nexus influencing the rise of the clandestine movement which operates from behind that veil of secrecy. The clandestine deviates from a typical definition of a movement which is typically defined as a group of people gathering together to achieve a distinct goal. As for the clandestine, neither the filmmakers collaborate with each other on their projects, nor do they share a homogenous aesthetics (and politics) which drive their narratives. Their heterogeneity also extends to the way they comprehend the social realities which are embedded in their films. However, the character which makes clandestine a movement is its shared experience with dominant forces. All the filmmakers share a common distinct goal of subverting the controlling forces of dominant cinema and "to mount effective challenges and resist the more powerful and advantaged elites" (Glasberg & Shannon, 2011, p. 105).

In the chapters to follow I will adopt three basic approaches to the question of the clandestine. Firstly, as I will map the transformation of Bengali cinema to where it is now, with an exploratory study of its historical foundations from an economic, social, cultural and

political perspective. I will also apply a similar methodology to clandestine cinema, uncovering the theme of the clandestine within the contemporary socio-political realm. I will support my analysis with interviews of prominent academics to assist in understanding the methodologies that these filmmakers adopt to make their films. Where applicable, I will do close analysis of a number of significant films made by the Clandestine Movement comparing and contrasting them with several other contemporary films and films from the Golden Age of Bengali cinema. These three approaches provide a dialectical perspective for analysing the material reality which substantiates the rise of the Clandestine movement.

1.1 Class Relations: A foundation of Clandestine Cinema

To understand the rise of clandestine cinema, I will be analysing class relations which will inform the historical analysis of Bengali cinema from the 1947 till the formation of clandestine cinema post 2010. Why is class important for understanding cinema in Bengal? A related question was asked by M.N. Srinivas, a renowned sociologist, who concluded that class relations, its study, and its effects are not relevant to any Indian context. According to Srinivas, the complexity of Indian society including the caste system and its history makes the Marxist view of class relations completely extraneous to it. He states:

> "[India is] far too complex, regional and
>
> sectional differences very real', therefore
>
> 'the studies of sociologists seemed to make
>
> sense to non-Marxists', and not to Marxists."   (Srinivas, 2012, p. 181)

Srinivas's interpretation of class and caste is confined to an ethnographic study of certain minority communities based in south India. He leaves out the importance of labour

interactions and the concept of a ruling intellectual force, while analysing society. Marx while providing simple objective formulation of a class states that in capitalism there are ones who have to sell their labour power for their survival and there are ones that do not; and the welfare of the former is based on market conditions of supply and demand of the labour. Erik Wright simplifies this definition even more by stating that class signifies "what one must do to survive and what one is free to do" (Wright, 1997). Class analysis becomes an important determinant in any kind of social analysis, even in the complex, regional and sectional context of India. The caste system of India is an ancient typical method of segregation of population based on heredity status which determines the labour of individuals. The concepts of caste and class are interrelated.

The theory of class and caste is a theory of what Leonard Beeghley terms 'stratification'. Stratification delineates how resources are distributed that are valuable in the society (Beeghley, 2000). But the caste system predates capitalism. The concept that differentiates class and caste structures are the concept of rigidity and mobility. Oliver Cox describes this difference as in the caste system the status of individuals is fixed for life which is attributed to them by the process of heredity, while in the class system there is an opportunity for advancement in the social status of individuals (Cox, 1944, p. 139). With the introduction of capitalism, class relations have been imposed on already existing caste relations. This imposition of class relations shapes the social institutions in the society which then influences the stratification of economic, social, cultural, and political resources (Andersen, 2007). Stratification creates an asymmetry of power and control over the resources giving rise to inequality. Scott Sernau describes inequality as "begin[ning] when someone can claim a position of social power, a central position in a network of exchange that can be exploited for personal gain" (Sernau, 2001, p. 41). The inequality of power and control over the resources

which gives rise to exploitation and alienation. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar while analysing the caste system writes:

> "That the social status of an individual by
>
> itself often becomes a source of power and
>
> authority is made clear by the sway which the
>
> Mahatmas have held over the common man." (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 194)

Cinema like all other cultural forms is a part of production. While analysing the importance of class on anything that is produced in society, Raju J. Das states that every human being relies heavily on things that need to be produced to meet their needs. These things need to be produced somewhere in the society itself and with the help human labour (be it mental or physical). And therefore, an equation can always be reached depending on who owns these means of production and who do not. Das states,

> "Production is a material activity based
>
> in a set of processes and can only happen
>
> within given social relations. These are,
>
> above all, the relations and the processes
>
> involving those who control the means of
>
> production and those who do not (direct producers).
>
> These are class relations: these are relations of
>
> exploitation, which is why these are also relations
>
> of conflict and struggle, whether covert or overt". (J.Das, 2020, p. 4)

But cinema is not only a function of material activity which is based in social relations, it is also informed by the social relations which are constantly evolving and changing. In the history of Bengali cinema change and evolution of cinematic language can be mapped to the changing social nexus. Cinema also embodies the class struggle, which arises due to

class relations affecting production. It dramatizes and represents class relations and narratives of class struggle. Ewick and Silbey, while examining the nature of cinematic narrative observe that,

> "… narratives are socially organized phenomena
>
> which, accordingly, reflect the cultural and
>
> structural features of their production... as socially
>
> organized phenomena, narratives are implicated in
>
> both the production of social meanings and the power
>
> relations expressed by and sustaining those
>
> meanings." (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 200)

In India, worsening inequalities under neoliberalism has birthed the spectre of communalism which is haunting all of India today. The rise of a Hindutva hegemony in India since the general election of 2014 has made this acute. This communalism has given rise to a new kind of nationalism which now extends its control over the social and cultural sphere of individual lives. There was a preconceived notion that globalising tendencies of capitalism would make the notion of nationalism redundant, but evidently that is not the case. According to Vanaik, a nation and its nationalism are not based on secular categories, but a hegemony based on "exclusivist racial, tribal or religious claims" (Vanaik, 2017, pp. 69, 71). However, this idea of nationalism which is propagated by the ruling BJP party is "qualitatively greater and dangerous" (Vanaik, 2017, p. 77). Vanaik while analysing this new idea of nationalism and how it influences social relation, writes,

> "In the era of modern mass politics, religious
>
> politics has a strength that is qualitatively
>
> greater and more dangerous than its equivalent
>
> in the pre-modern era. The distinguishing characteristic

of modern politics is the decisive significance

of mass mobilization, mass appeal and popular

legitimization of elite rule." (Vanaik, 2017, p. 77)

After the general elections of 2014, with the right-wing BJP party taking control of the central governance, the social indices have plummeted to an all-time low. According to Times of India, on average 88 rape cases are reported daily, but the conviction rate is below 30% (The Times of India, 2020). According to the same report states such as Uttar Pradesh which are under the BJP regime have recorded the highest cases while convictions rates are even lower. However, there is also an overt and successful attempt to deny evidence. In 2021 the Ministry of Home Affairs reported to the Lok Sabha that the data on mob lynching, hate crimes and cow vigilantism put forward by the National Crime Bureau, are unreliable and cannot be taken into consideration (Special Correspondent, 2021). The overall progress of the Human Development Index according to a United Nations Development Report has been the slowest in the last eight years (HDRO, 2020).

Although all governments post India's independence has practiced different versions of restrictions through legislations to throw the voices of protest or subversion under the veil of the clandestine, but since the general elections of 2014, this practice has taken on its most penetrating form. It has been a policy of the government and state-controlled institutions to categorically target individuals and institutions pushing them under a veil from where their voices can never be heard and where they are assumed not to exist. For example in an article published in The New York Post about the recent protests against the farm laws, Mujib Mashal and Sameer Yasir writes, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's approach to dissent increasingly involves stifling dissenting voices, blocking the internet and cracking down on journalists" (Yasir and Mashal, 2021). Professor Gyan Prakash of Princeton University draws parallels with Modi's regime to that of prime minister Indira Gandhi during the Emergency of

1975. The Emergency "curbed civil liberties, imprisoned political opponents, and shut down news media (Yasir and Mashal, 2021). But I would argue that the present realities are much worse. All data and statistics point towards deteriorating social indices, but these are denied or blamed away as organisational malformation of previous governments, as if denial can erase reality.

Guy Standing, an economist who has an elaborate body of work, scrutinising class relations and class formations in his monograph, *"The Corruption of Capitalism: Why Rentiers Thrive and Work does not Pay"* analyses this performance of veiling cast by the government and its institutions. He observes that it exists because of the economic crises which are entrenching the power of the plutocracy. He writes,

> "The(n) governments […], blithely making claims
>
> about growth, the number of jobs or
>
> 'balancing books', blaming their predecessors,
>
> disputing the statistics or just ignoring the findings.
>
> If protests erupt, a blast of condemnation comes
>
> from defenders of the status quo, dismissing the
>
> victims or protestors as lazy, irresponsible
>
> and inadequate." (Standing, 2016, p. 15)

In India external debt rose from US$11.5 billion in October -December 2021 to US$ 614.9 billion in the March 2022, a total rise of 44.4% from December 2021 (Upasani, 2022). The government reacts to this crisis by injecting more money in the economy and markets to "cushion" the elite and plutocracy (Standing, 2021). According to the same Oxfam report the wealthiest 10% of the population in India holds 77% of the national wealth. In 2017, 73% of the wealth generated went to the richest 1% while the poorest half of 67 million Indians saw a wealth generation of just 1%(Himanshu, 2021). This creates a huge income inequality and a

gap in wealth generation. According to the same Oxfam report the wealthiest 10% of the populations hold 77% of the national wealth. In 2017, 73% of the wealth generated went to the riches 1% while the poorest half of 67 million Indians saw a wealth generation of just 1% (Himanshu, 2021). Standing states that this inequality allows a "middle class fraud" (Standing, 2021); by which the middle-income group or the salariat experience an income disproportion even though the people they are working for earn drastically more. The elites and the plutocrats control and mobilise the resources, influencing the social and cultural determinants of a society. Through their influence they control the media, public opinion, and all other forces that are responsible for the creation of a dominant narrative.

For example, in March 2022 a film called *The Kashmir Files* (Agnihotri, 2022) was released. The film received criticism for its biased stance against the Kashmiri Muslims whom the director proposes as perpetrators trying to disintegrate the Hindutva ideology. The film lacks any effort to historically analyse and understand the context of Kashmir and acts as a mouthpiece of the BJP and supports its efforts to abolish Section 370 which gives the state of Jammu and Kashmir its independent status. Film critic Suparna Sharma writes;

> "*The Kashmir Files* has a B-grade soul
>
> and lust for gore. It has no grace, no
>
> aesthetic appeal and no patience for
>
> context or complexity. It conjures
>
> up a dark period of Indian history
>
> by cherry-picking, pruning and twisting
>
> incidents and events to cast a large section
>
> of Kashmiris as villains." (Sharma S. , 2022)

Even though the film was a classic example of propaganda, misinformation and propagation of nationalism based on Hindutva ideology, the mainstream print media and

television channels owned by the plutocrats and elites showered it with praise making it a global hit. The film secured a return of US$32 million globally in just 3 weeks (HT Entertainment Desk , 2022). This film can be juxtaposed to Anand Patwardhan's 2018 documentary *Vivek* (Reason, 2018). The film critically analyses the incidents of student leader arrests, mob lynching of Muslims, killing of journalists who questioned the government and the position of Dalits in BJP ruled states through an unapologetic and unprejudiced lens. It is based on factual evidence and discourses from both the oppressors and the oppressed rather than the biased polemics of *The Kashmir Files*. It informs the audience about the down-spiralling of the social conditions in India since the BJP came to power in 2014. In an interview given to The New York Times Magazine by journalist Abhrajyoti Chakraborty, Anand Patwardhan describes the film's status as "semi clandestine" because even after two years of the release of the film at Toronto International Film Festival, the film remains officially unreleased in India (Chakraborty A. , 2020). The same dominant media channels which created the hype for *The Kashmir Files*, did not produce a single analysis or criticism for *Vivek* as if the film did not exist.

But the theory of Clandestine is not just about the theory of alienation, it is also a theory about a struggle to subvert this process of alienation; to continue producing and distributing films to audiences. *Vivek* was later released on YouTube where it now has over one million views. This struggle becomes an important factor for understanding the Clandestine as a struggle against a class who owns and controls the means of production in the dominant sphere. Marx's theory provides a rational understanding of these social struggles as something other than sociological laws (Debord, 2005, p. 40) as Srinivas insists.

1.2 Why Clandestine is a Film Movement?

Even though as I argued earlier, it is difficult to identify the clandestine filmmakers as a collective, I persist in calling the clandestine a movement. Q, Pradipta Bhattacharyya and Aditya Vikram Sengupta can be identified as a group of filmmakers who operate from a shared experience of contemporary social realities. Through their productions they have set new paradigms by transforming the existing conditions of filmmaking. I do believe that the effects of their filmmaking will be far-reaching in Bengal and the rest of India. I would argue that they constitute a 'real movement'. Guy Debord, while explaining the concept of a real movement writes,

> "The real movement that transforms
>
> Existing conditions has been the dominant
>
> social force since the beginning of
>
> the bourgeoisie's victory within the
>
> economic sphere, and this dominance
>
> became visible once the victory was
>
> translated onto the political plane.
>
> The development of productive forces
>
> shattered the old production relations,
>
> and all static order crumbled." (Debord, 2005, p. 37)

I would also argue that it is difficult to apply appelations like independent, indy, underground or alternative to the clandestine films even though they share many characteristics with these movements. Duncan Reekie in his 2007 book *Subversion: The Definitive History of*

Underground Cinema, while effusing about the distribution and exhibition pattern of underground cinema writes:

> "The venues for the Underground were
>
> illegitimate: late night screenings
>
> in rundown movie houses, lofts,
>
> psychedelic clubs, porn cinemas,
>
> book shops, warehouse parties
>
> and rock gigs.... Films marked
>
> with amateurism, incompetence
>
> and poverty were enjoyed as
>
> spontaneous, honest and democratic
>
> subversions of the sedated commercial
>
> cinema and the repression of legitimate culture." (Wees, 2009, p. 95)

However, the "aura of subversion" vanished when the screenings were institutionalised at art museums, art galleries, cinematheques, film societies, universities, and colleges. It is difficult to think of underground cinema as subversive or illegitimate today. The filmmakers of the clandestine also frequent national and international film festivals. For exhibition, they use web platforms like Netflix, Prime Video, or even YouTube, thus the iconoclasm that formerly characterised single-location screenings are ruptured, and along with it, the aura of exclusivity.

It would also be problematic to call the clandestine movement an alternative film movement. While theorizing the concept of alternative cinema in Bengal post digitization, Amrita Biswas focuses mainly on the production and exhibition pattern and how digital and technological infrastructure has pushed the Bengali films in the glocal arena. She delineates how alternative cinema in Bengal can be traced back to 1947 (Biswas, 2019, p. 115) with the

introduction of the film societies which encouraged a cinephile culture, and this always laid outside the purview of the "mainstream commercial industry" (Biswas, 2019, p. 113). Biswas accepts the historic lineage and describes in detail the role of film societies and film festivals in the growth of these films. However, she connects that past with this new era (post-digitization) by simply asserting similarities in technological infrastructure. She states:

> "The technological infrastructure of the
>
> post-liberalization metropolis, besides
>
> fuelling artistic endeavours, also paved
>
> the way for a 'pirate culture' that, being
>
> animated by 'digital and mechanical
>
> reproduction', assumed a trajectory of its own." (Biswas, 2019, p. 122).

Alternative cinema of Bengal was a movement sustained by the idea of a collective which was propagated through film societies, film journals and a rise of a generation of cinephiles who were influential in determining the contours of this movement. The movement had social and aesthetic goals. In the case of the Clandestine, this idea of a collective is shattered. The filmmakers of clandestine cinema do identify as a collective nor are they influenced by film societies or such institutions. Their operation is atomised to individual projects. The filmmakers rarely collaborate with each other on projects and seldom share crews. For example, Q and Sengupta usually work on international co-productions, so their labour force usually consists of international as well as national crews. Bhattacharyya always works with local crew members, especially people from his hometown of Tehatta and Berhampore.

Sherry Ortner defines an independent film as "an antithesis of a Hollywood studio film" (Ortner, 2012, p. 2). According to Ortner, any film that is produced outside the purview of a mainstream studio system is an independent film. The 'independent' appellation is

difficult to apply in Bengal. With only one major production house[2] , the majority of films produced in Bengal are independent in nature because they are fundamentally made outside the studio system, which follows a Fordist economic model of film production (Sengupta A. , The Clandestine Cinema of Bengal: Genesis, Evolution and Praxis, 2021). Therefore, even a big budget film can be called an independent film. Thus, independent cinema is the rule in Bengal and not an exception.

1.3 Conclusion

It is elusive therefore to define the clandestine as a part of underground, alternative or independent because they do not confirm with the same materialistic relations as the clandestine. This makes clandestine a novel concept to understand the praxis of certain contemporary films from Bengal. Not only that, clandestine's characteristics of a film movement also distinguishes from the other film movements whilst keeping in place the ideologies of a 'real movement' to its very core.

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[2] Shree Venkatesh Film Pvt. Ltd (SVF) is the major film production and distribution company in Bengal currently. Although there are few others such as Eskay Films, Surinder Films, etc, the scale of their production is very basic, and they predominantly crater to the certain rural section audience in Bengal. The scale and capital power of SVF exceeds many production houses in eastern India.

Chapter 2   The Bengal Paradigm

This chapter analyses the cinemas of Bengal post-independence, through to the late 1970s. The most significant attribute of the era was an emergence of a new cinematic language of social realism. This cinematic language influenced an entire generation of filmmakers and became a major cinematic paradigm not only in Bengal but in all of India. By the end of 1970s it was in decline, and it ultimately fizzled out by the mid-1980s. The chapter explores the rise of this paradigm and its decline.

2.1 The Bengal Paradigm: The Genesis

On 26th August 1955, *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Little Road, 1955) directed by Satyajit Ray was released in Basusree Cinema, Kolkata. The release of the film signalled the genesis of a new cinema. Firstly, realism, underpinned by its ethical and philosophical premises was introduced to Bengali cinema (and Indian cinema as a whole). Secondly, it laid a paradigm of what a cinema of adaptation should look like; because if Ray's filmography is analysed closely, then evidence of adaptations is profound. In fact, the first seven films of his career were adaptations from various novels and in his long-illustrated career only a handful of films were from original screenplays. This was significant, as these adaptations differed to those that came before. These films that Ray was making diminished the dominance of mythical and mythological stories which were prevalent. His adaptations were based on social-realist novels and stories of contemporary situations. Ray provided an archetype of adaptive cinema which resonated with Indian and international cinephiles alike. These factors inspired many films from upcoming filmmakers in subsequent years not only in

Bengal but all over India. Sharmistha Gooptu in her book *Bengali Cinema 'An Other Nation'* describes this inspiration as the *"Ray Factor"* (Gooptu, 2011, p. 170).

However, perhaps Ray's influence on Bengali and Indian cinema is somewhat overdetermined. If we briefly focus on realism in world cinema, it can be traced as a post-World War II phenomenon. Manoj Sharma while analysing the history of realism in cinema in Europe writes,

> "It (Neorealism) was a reaction against the artificiality of
> pre-World War II and fascist cinema. Neorealism sought to
> deal realistically with the events leading up to the war and
> the socio-economic problems that were engendered during
> the period and afterwards." (Sharma M. , 2008, p. 952)

In Indian and Bengali cinema this realism was informed by a collective consciousness of social utopia. This consciousness was instilled post India's independence after 200 years of oppression and exploitation by the British empire. The new India based itself on secular, progressive and socialist ideologies. Sunil Khilnani describes this as "Nehru's Faith" (Khilnani, 2002). This Nehruvian post-independence ideology became the foundation of a new cinematic expression, identifiable with Ray's realistic narrative and cinematic expression. But the expression of cinematic realism cannot be solely attributed to Ray. Filmmakers like Mrinal Sen and Ritwik Kumar Ghatak were making films and inventing new cinematic grammar at the same time, setting different kinds of paradigms from that of Ray while aligning themselves with realism. Sen used Brechtian distanciation techniques in his films and demonstrated models of political representation in cinema from a developing nation. Ghatak established a working blueprint of new Indian archetypal cinematic melodrama. If Ray's paradigm influenced filmmakers like Tapan Sinha, Tarun Majumder, Shyam Benegal and other mainstream and

parallel cinema filmmakers from the period and later; then Sen and Ghatak's work influenced the filmmaking of more radical filmmakers like Mani Kaul, Ketan Mehta, Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Saeed Akhtar Mirza to name a few.

The Ray Paradigm is simply a shortcut for the inventiveness of Bengali cinema. Perhaps, we can safely reclaim this connection as the Bengal Paradigm rather than felicitating to one individual filmmaker. Realism was not invented by Ray, neither was he the sole practitioner of the expression. The Bengal Paradigm like all other film movements was a reflection of the social conditions of contemporary Bengal and India.

2.2 The Shift to Urban Concerns

Bengal has a rich tradition of folk culture which dates centuries back. But it came into prominence by the 15th century CE. Poems, songs, performances, and dance built around Indian mythologies were a very popular form of entertainment in the rural parts of Bengal since the rise of the Bhakti Movement[3] in the mid to late 15th century CE. The characteristic features of these type of folk traditions are stylisation, extensive use of music and exaggerated delivery of dialogue. *Jatra*[4] one of the most prominent open air performances involving music, dance

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[3] The Bhakti Movement is a Hindu religious movement in India. Although its principal ideologies is religious, it had socio-political impacts on the population. The fundamental ideology of this movement was to gain salvation through devotion. It began around the 7th to 8th century CE in South India but by 14th to 15th century CE it propagated across the whole of India including Bengal. See for example Rekha Pande, The Bhakti Movement—An Interpretation.

[4] Jatra is a folk theatre tradition which originated in Bengal and later spread to various eastern provinces of the subcontinent such as Odisha, Assam and Tripura. It dates back to the Chaitanya movement or popularly known as Bhakti movement which took shape in the Nabadwip village of Nadia district. The plays

and acting became a tantalising form of entertainment for the rural and small-town populations of Bengal. Jatra and these folk forms became representations of the narratives of the daily lives[5].The narratives of these performances were based on mythological stories informed by the Bhakti Movement. The early theatre performances in Kolkata were also heavily influenced by Jatra. Later when the moving image was introduced in Bengal in 1896 (which was known as Bioscope) it adopted Jatra's aesthetic sense. Hiralal Sen one of the pioneers of Indian Cinema created the Royal Bioscope Company filming scenes from these stage performances. With the advent of sound, sound stages were established in Kolkata. Slowly and steadily the Bengali studio system[6] started taking shape. The films produced in these studios were primarily replication of the Jatra format. They were predominantly musicals which also adapted Parsi theatre styles. Although the film activities were city centric, the content and production aesthetics still embraced the values and sentiments of the rural population of Bengal.

With rapid industrialisation post-independence, the rural population and rural interests started losing favour and dominance. Industrialization, urbanization and changing

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usually consisted of mythological stories performed on an open-air stage usually set in the middle of a filed. These performances resembled much with the *Nautanki* of Uttar Pradesh and *Tamasha* of Maharashtra. See for example Pabitra Sarkar, Jatra: The Popular Theatre of Bengal, Journal of South Asian Literature, 10(2/4), p. 87–107.

[5] These folk traditions would later be used as a revolutionary tool by the IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association), a leftist cultural organisation which would propagate socialist ideas by penetrating the mass by reviving these folk narratives

[6] With the introduction of sync sound in Bengali films which were popularly known as Talkies, the importance of building sound stages was necessary. New Theatres of Kolkata founded by B.N. Sircar in the 1931 was one of the most successful studios which ran for almost two decades till 1955. See for example Madhuja Mukherjee, When was the "Studio Era" in Bengal: Transition, Transformation and Configurations during the 1930s, *Wide Screen, Vol. (8/1), 1-23*

lifestyles influenced a cultural change which alienated rural and small-town audiences from the Bengali cultural space. Dasgupta while accounting for the alienation of the rural population states:

> "In West Bengal, all film activity is Calcutta-based; all
> filmmakers live in Calcutta. This is not merely because
> Calcutta is where the facility for filmmaking exits; it is
> where all the modern cultures live. Traditional cultural
> centres such as Murshidabad, the home of past Muslim
> glory, and Nadia the centre of Hindu philosophy and indeed
> of Bengali language; have declined to rack and ruin"
> (Dasgupta C. , 1991, p. 46).

2.3 The Historiographic Rudiments of a Class: The Agrarian Proletariat

Bengal has always been predominantly an agrarian province. The socio-political history of Bengal is replete with agrarian social and political movements which rose against the oppression of the ruling class. The initial socio-political movements in Bengal were predominantly against the Zamindars or the landlords who used to own large portions of land creating huge socio-economic asymmetry. These political movements were effective in changing social relations and class structures giving birth to an agrarian proletariat. The history of this class formation began in the fields of Bengal.

In their monograph, *The Agrarian Structure of Bangladesh*, economists F. Tomasson Jannuzi and James Peach state that prior to the British rule peasants possessed "heritable rights to the land" (Harris, 1989, p. 266). During Mughal rule, the peasants had the "traditional rights to cultivate" the land and the Zamindars or the landlords were appointed as

"revenue collectors of the Mughal courts" (ibid, p. 269). According to Michael Harris, since the British incursion, the "landholding structure of the region ultimately crystalized" after the British organized the laws (ibid, 269).

The British East India Company laid the foundations for the formation of the agrarian proletariat, a history that can be traced back the to the Great Bengal Famine of the 1770s. Around ten million people lost their lives due to this calamity (Sen A. , 1981, p. 39) and a smallpox epidemic followed due to two years of intermittent rainfall (Roy, 2019, p. 117). The famine is a great example of colonial and state imposed immiseration.

> "The state mishandled the famine. No state in these times
> had the infrastructure or the access to information needed
> to deal with a natural disaster on such a scale. On top of
> that problem, this was not a normal state. The Company
> was in charge of taxation, whereas the Nawab looked after
> governance. The two partners did not trust one another."
> (Roy, 2021, p. 88)

Due to the famine, the farmers with small farms started selling off their land to bigger owners who possessed enough resources to buy inputs for cultivation as well as buy land from the smaller farmers. This caused a major imbalance in wealth and income distribution. As the virtuous cycle reinforces itself, the farmers who once possessed lands now in search jobs and livelihood started gravitating towards bigger farms to work as sharecroppers. This resulted in

the creation of a new sub-class; a sub-class of farmers called the *Bargadars*[7]. The Bargadars did not have any ownership right of the land that they contributed their labour, and the contract with landowners was usually verbal which had no legal validation (Khasnabis, 1981, p. A 43). Thus, the lack of a legal validation meant that the Bargadars could be exploited on the basis of the labour that they provided and also the amount of produce that they could keep for their own survival.

By the end of the British rule in India, the Bargadars from Bengal specially from the South 24 Pargana district called for a full-fledged revolution against the large landowners and tenant landowners. The Bargadars previously had to give away half of their harvest to the landlords. The demand that rose from this movement was to reduce the share to one third (Majumdar, 2011) hence the name *Tebhaga*[8]. The significant nature of this movement was that it was a classic example of class struggle. While the dominant nationalistic movement for freedom was at its full height, the Tebhaga movement distinguished itself completely. This movement was a class revolution of the agrarian proletariat of Bengal against the agrarian capitalist, who by this time had distanced themselves so far from the interests of the agrarian proletariat accounting for a disproportionate share of equity (Bose S. , 1993, pp. 84–90, 130–4, 162–9).

The independence of India in 1947 marked the beginning of new propositions for the Bargadars. West Bengal and Kerala were the among first states to adopt land reforms in 1955. By the beginning of a 1960s Bengal saw rapid industrialization and a considerable

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[7] Bargadars which in English translates to sharecroppers, are people who labour on other person's land on the agreement of delivering a share of the produce to the landowners while retaining a portion of it for self-consumption.

[8] Tebhaga in Bengali means one third.

migration of population from rural parts of Bengal into the new industrialised towns that were built. The left, with a mainly the Marxist orientation, gained massive momentum in Bengal due to the growing industries and growing labour bases in small towns and cities. With their ideological discourses gaining popularity in Bengal, on 15 March 1967 the United Front[9] extricated the Indian National Congress from power. The basis which formed the manifesto of the United Front was land reform and a pro-agrarian stance.

The essence of this period is captured beautifully in Ritwik Ghatak's 1970 documentary film- *Amar Lenin* (My Lenin, 1970). The film captures the ideological transformation of a village youth from being just a farmer into a politically aware citizen of the country. In one of the scenes the youth travels to Kolkata to attend a political rally conducted by the left front where he gets motivated from the speeches made by the leaders. He comes back to his village to participate in protests against the agrarian rich demanding basic rights which have been snatched away. The important feature of this film is the time of its making. It was made at a time when industrialisation and urbanisation became dominant. With the United Front taking up the pro agrarian stance, Ritwik Ghatak extends his empathy for this ideology. It is also the time when the city itself was at its peak of social activism. Youths were galvanising towards left leaning ideologies by taking up arms trying to break the shackles of the postcolonial dogma. The film captures the struggles and the political milieu of Bengal of that time.

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[9] The United Front consisted of a coalition of 14 parties including the CPI and the CPI(M). See for example Electoral Politics in West Bengal: The Growth of the United Front by Marcus F. Franda published by Pacific Affairs, University of British Columbia, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Autumn, 1969), pp. 279-293.

2.4 The Phase of Industrialization: The Urban Proletariat

On 27th September 1963, *Mahanagar* (The Big City, 1963) by Satyajit Ray was released. The narrative revolves around a middle-class family where Arati (Madhabi Mukherjee) the housewife takes a job of a salesgirl to support the finances of the household, despite familial and social hurdles and breaking a major taboo in Bengali society. Critic Eric Rhodes, on analysing Ray's style, draws parallels with the realism of nineteenth-century European authors. Rhodes states that the characters are "both individuals and social types" elaborating "the city's economic and class structure is more important to the narrative than its scenic qualities" (Sengoopta, 2013). But what Rhodes misses here is the intricate nuances which Ray observes in the social transformation. For example, in a scene where Arati is leaving for her first day at office, Arati is having breakfast with her husband. Ray composes the frame in such a way that takes in Arati's mother-in-law cooking lunch. Her expression is of someone unable to comprehend the social transformations around her. In that one deep focus frame the narrative comments on the generational social transformation that has occurred in Bengal and how old traditional dogmas are gradually being replaced by the new progressive ones.

The Bengal paradigm was recording the great social changes that came with post-colonial progressive politics playing a dominant role in Indian societies. For example, in the final sequence of the film Arati confides in her husband Subrata (Anil Chatterjee) about protesting against a transgression for which she had to resign from her job. Arati asks her husband, "In this Big City with so many jobs, can't neither of us get a job?" to which Subrata replies "Let us try, I believe we both can get jobs." The sequence ends with husband and wife both walking side by side among the crowded office suburb of Kolkata representing a cinematic idiom of a new Bengal filled with hope. Chandak Sengoopta states, "the years of Jawaharlal Nehru's prime ministership (1947–64), that a glorious future awaited the fledgling nation if its citizens

worked hard, rejected outdated dogmas, and acted with complete moral integrity" (Sengoopta, 2013).

By the end 1950s and early 1960s Bengal was going through a rapid phase of industrialization. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) was slowly gaining power in electoral politics by securing support from the increasing urbanised proletarians. With more industries opening up, new semi urban spaces like Durgapur, Chittaranjan, Kalyani, etc were becoming centres of modern education, culture and creative activities. The left front has been propagating socialist ideas by exploiting the cultural potentialities pre independence. But since the 1950s and 60s with the popularity of leftist ideologies, this exploitation intensified providing an ascending thrust in the cultural space. IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association) is one of the oldest cultural organisation of India whose main motive was a social awakening against oppression began as a "independence and anti-fascist movement" (People's Theatre Stars the People). IPTA used folk traditions such as Jatra and its aesthetics to penetrate the mass. For example, Utpal Dutt[10] one of the most influential playwrights during this period and a member of the IPTA, in an interview to The Drama Review states,

> "Theatre is essentially people's theatre,
>
> which means that it must be played before
>
> the masses. […] Essentially, the revolution
>
> is first for workers and peasants. Revolutionary
>
> theatre must preach revolution; it must not only

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[10] Utpal Dutta was primarily a theatre actor, director and playwright. He was one of the most influential figures in the Bengali cultural space form the late 1950s till his death in 1993. His plays Angar (Coal) and Titumir has been monumental in shaping a theatre of protest and revolution. A devout communist, he acted in the films of Mrinal Sen (Bhuvan Shome) and Stayajit Ray (Hirak Rajar Deshe, Jana Aranya, etc)

expose the system but also call for the violent

smashing of the state machine." (Dutt, 1971)

Dutt used folk narratives which were popular in folk traditions. For example, in his plays like *Tiner Tolowar* (Tin Sword) – a play about the colonial immiseration of Bengali theatre artists during the British rule. The play incorporates styles of Jatra performances which was aimed to penetrate the less literate grassroot level so that they could be made aware about individual rights and protest when exploited. Thus, the use of folk traditions as a form of protest has been best explored during this time to mobilise the population against capitalist atrocities. The use of folk traditions later transcended into Bengali cinema during the era of Bengal paradigm. Ritwik Ghatak one of the initial members of IPTA had considerable influence of the IPTA aesthetics and folk narratives which manifested in his films. For example, in *Komol Gandhar* (E Flat, 1961), scholar Erin O'Donnell, signifies the "the use of sound and song – powerfully expresses the significance of this theatrical movement (IPTA) in Bengal's cultural history" (O'Donnell, 2010, p. 262) which were heavily based on deep folk traditions of Bengal. Thus, the use of folk traditions and its praxis often has disrupted the forces of dominant paradigms.

This gave rise to a new middle class with a "distinctiveness" (Gooptu, 2011, p. 4) which was reflected in its (left leaning) politics, playing a significant role in shaping its cultural life. The mass rural population was soon forgotten as Kolkata became the epicentre of all major cultural activities. Chidananda Dasgupta in his study of Indian popular cinema describes how Marxist ideology "cast the city in the lead role" (Dasgupta C. , 1991, p. 46). The narratives too were changing. Once what used to be mythical stories of good and evil now were being replaced with the idea of the old and the new, a valorisation of progress with the old being represented by rural Bengal and the new by the city. For example, in Satyajit Ray's *Aparajito* (The Unvanquiahsed, 1956), Apu the son of village Brahmin leaves his ancestral

village home and travels to Kolkata in search of education and a better life. Even in the mainstream blockbuster *Deya Neya* (Give and Take, 1963), Prasanta, leaves his family business and travels to Kolkata to fulfil his dreams.

By the end of 1960s there were drastic changes taking place in the economic and political fronts which were affecting cultural production. The Left allied parties were gaining prominence in the political spere of Bengal, but the rising power soon caused a split in the interpretation of Marxist ideologies and a Maoist approach to revolution started taking shape. A peasant uprising took place in the Naxalbari region of North Bengal under the leadership of Charuchandra Mazumder and Kanu Sanyal. The CPI(M) favoured a constitutional approach, while the Naxalbari movement adopted the Maoist approach of armed revolution against the bourgeoisie[11]. By 1967, the Naxal movement turned into a full-scale rebellion; farmers started seizing lands from the landlords at gunpoint, and the tribal population, the Santals, of the region started taking part in the rebellion killing landlords and policemen in broad daylight. In 1970 the North Bengal unit of the United Front under the leadership of Charuchandra Mazumdar called for the commandeering of land and protracted armed resistance (Krishnaji, 1980, p. 1515).

The extent of the uprising was such that by 1970-71 it hit the capital city of Kolkata. Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India launched operation Steeplechase to curb this

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[11] The manifesto of the Naxalbari movement was based on a set of eight monographs called the *Historic Eight Documents* which was drafted by Charu Mazumdar from 1965-67. The fundamental appeal of this document was to put forward through a series of case studies that India had turned itself into a bourgeois state and serious considerations were required against the revisionism which the CPI(M) had adopted to work within the constitutional framework of the country. This ideology was a product of the Sino-Soviet split where the Naxalites rejected the dogmas of the then Soviet Union which was supporting India.

rebellion[12]. The city soon turned into a living nightmare, where thousands of educated youths were arrested and killed on the suspicion of associating with the rebellion. The horrors of this era were depicted in Mrinal Sen's *Kolkata 71* (Sen M. , Kolkata 71, 1971). The film opens with a prologue, set in a surreal courthouse providing the perfect allegory of the lawlessness and down-spiralling of the socio-political conditions of contemporary Bengal. The sequence depicts a trial of an unemployed young man who had allegedly vandalised shops out of frustration induced by unemployment and social sabotage being committed on the streets. Sen provides a running commentary on the enraged psyche of the youth of Bengal of that era. While the government was busy curtailing the rebellion on the streets, lockouts and strikes were becoming a very frequent narrative of the industries. Many businesses slowly shut down creating a mass of unemployed, underemployed, and unproductive labour with each passing year. According to a paper published by the Department of Economics of the University of Connecticut, national share of industrial production in West Bengal dropped from 20-24% in the 1950s -1960s to 13.50% in the 1970s and these figures kept on plummeting in the subsequent years.

> "It is beyond dispute that labour trouble at the factories
> and political unrest throughout the state hurt industry in
> West Bengal. In 1965 there were 179 strikes and 49
> incidents of lockout in factories. In 1970, by comparison,
> there were 678 strikes and 128 lockouts" (Ray S. C.,
> 2011, p. 7).

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[12] The Indian National Congress was in power both in the central government and in the state of West Bengal with Siddhartha Shankar Roy as the chief minister.

Capital was discipling labour by exporting capital to other states. States like Maharashtra and Gujarat were absorbing this capital being drained out of Bengal due to the socio-political turmoil. Strikes, *gheraos,*[13] and lockouts were a common phenomenon. While the agrarian front was slowly gaining dominance, national share of industrial production in Bengal kept plummeting. This plummeting share of national production had a detrimental effect on the working class in terms of mass unemployment which created a disarrayed population of educated youth. The employment rate of Bengal in the 1955-56 was 27.00% which plunged to 16.20% in 1970-71 (Ray S. C., 2011). Satyajit Ray in his film *Pratidwandi* (The Adversary, 1970) depicts the story of young Siddhartha (Dhritiman Chatterjee) facing unemployment and losing his dreams of getting a job in the city. He finally descends into a violent physical confrontation with the interview officials before vandalising the interview chamber. Ray captures the violence and the frustrations which the educated youths encountered as a social reality.

The economic disintegration exacerbated by the chauvinistic ideology of the Naxalite movement created an environment of social and cultural disorder in the city of Kolkata and throughout Bengal. The exhibition of the films that were being produced was affected. Naxalite insurgence followed by police and state retaliation resulted in mass violence. During the 1970s when the movement was at its height in the city, along with killing teachers, police, and businessmen as class enemies, the Naxals frequently bombed cinema halls (Sengupta A. , The Clandestine Cinema of Bengal: Genesis, Evolution and Praxis, 2021). The revolutionaries

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[13] Gherao in Bengali literally means encirclement. It is similar to picketing and was a common tradition during the United Front era when the police could not interfere into any labour disputes. Trade Unions and trade leaders took charge of every aspect of labour agitations.

considered the dominant cinema of that time as bourgeois entertainment which contradicted with Naxal ideology. Production of cinema and its exhibition deteriorated.

2.5 Conclusion

The Bengal paradigm never recovered from the political turmoil of the era. Audiences became more inclined to the escapist films that were produced in Mumbai which were filled with stories of 'revenge, unsatisfaction and an inherent desire to break the shackles of the present' (Sengupta A. , 2015, p. 2). The vibrant film culture in Bengal was now a thing of the past.

Chapter 3 The Death of Bengal Paradigm

The years following the Naxal movement remained equally turbulent. Employment rates kept plummeting, students protested across the city and country, ministers of the cabinet were charged with corruption – in short, the "Nehruvian Faith" disintegrated completely. Amidst of all the turbulence, the left front (with CPI(M) securing a two thirds majority) gets elected to govern West Bengal in 1977. This chapter is a study on the history of evolution of Bengali cinema extending from a period of 1977 to 2010, a period that translates to the dominance of the CPI(M) in Bengali electoral politics. The chapter analyses how the changing class relations, socialist reforms, capital accumulation and adoption of a neoliberal praxis affected Bengali films.

3.1 Operation Barga: The creation of the Lumpenproletariat

In 1975 a state of internal Emergency was declared throughout the country which was followed by a period of media suppression and total autocracy. The Emergency was lifted in 1977 and the first election was held where the CPI(M) won the Bengal elections with absolute majority. The first policy that the government undertook was that of land reform which they termed *Operation Barga*, which was primarily land redistribution from large landowners to sharecroppers. Initially, Operation Barga was a huge success; by September 1978 and July 1979 around 7,32,955 Bargadars were identified and registered (Khasnabis, 1981, p. A47). The compound annual growth rate of rice production as compared to 1970-80 had risen from 1.22 to 6.41tons in 1980-90 (Bandopadhay, 2003, p. 880). Poor farmers were empowered

economically and socially. The state economy increased its per capita national share of agricultural produce.

Although initially operation Barga was a success, it suffered from various flaws including its implementation and even in the methodology of its implementation. The distribution of land to genuine recipients became a major issue. It was alleged that the land registered on records was often not in the name of the genuine owners (Mukhopadhay, 1979). On one hand there was wide-scale publicity which attracted a large population of landless farmers to try and get registered, but on the other hand the infrastructure needed for registration of a large population was absent. It was a huge hurdle for officials to register genuine names of the Bargadars (Chattopadhyay, 1979, p. 45). What in effect happened was wealth transfer to the land-owning classes. In most cases it was found that the land was transferred to those who were already landowners, such as village chiefs or their relatives. There was also rampant land accumulation which converted small landowners already in possession of lands into what is sometimes termed as 'the rural rich" (Banerjee, 2002).

Suhas Chattopadhyay writes that before Operation Barga, a piece of land used to be cultivated by two different set of Bargadars. One set of Bargadars cultivated the main or primary crop (*aman* crop) such as rice and the other set cultivated the secondary crop (*boro* crop). According to the law the land should be distributed between the two sets equally, but that was seldom the case. Since no more than one Bargadar could be recorded for the land, "it was usually recorded in the name of the Bargadar who cultivated the aman crop and the Bargadar for the boro crop was left unrecorded" (Chattopadhyay, 1979, p. 45). This usually gave rise to farmer agitations which according to Chattopadhyay often bore political affiliations, i.e., the agitator's interests were supported by the opposition parties and the governing party supported retaliations that followed. Thus, the land reforms which started as a socialist reform gradually started levitating towards land accumulation. This segregated the

disenfranchised Bargadars into a new class of the lumpenproletariat. The failures of Operation Barga marks the base of lumpenization in Bengal.

3.2 The Theory of Lumpenization

According to Clyde Barrow the concept of the Lumpenization has its roots in the historical political writings of Marx. He states that in order to understand the concept of lumpenization we must understand the class of lumpenproletariat as an economic category and then proceed with the historical political writing through that lens (Barrow, 2020, p. 62).

In a passage from *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850) Engels observes that as the Roman Empire was expanding there was a rise of consolidated land owned by the aristocracy and an increase of slaves who were employed as farm labourers. The plebian farmers could not compete with the aristocrats and their input of slave labourers. Thus, there was a displacement of farmers to cities in search of employment. The plebian farmers displaced to the cities soon became a surplus population.

A similar observation can be made in relation to the underemployment and unemployment of the Bargadars in Bengal. Operation Barga gave rise to a dual situation. Firstly, the consolidation of lands by people who were not real beneficiaries of land redistribution rising to the rank of agrarian capitalists. They could invest in mechanised factors of production rejecting the demand for physical labour and thus upsetting the labour equilibrium. Secondly, Bargadars who were not registered either became underemployed and continued working as landless farmers for agrarian capitalists or became unemployed and travelled to cities in search of employment. But there is a limit to the absorption power of cities and towns due to the deteriorating state of industrialisation in Bengal (discussed in the previous chapter) and the Bargadars became the underemployed and unemployed as surplus population in the cities as well.

In a passage indexed as "Working class in England—lumpenproletariat—251, 552" by the editors of Marx and Engels Collected Works (MECW), Engels observes that the historic origination of the lumpenproletariat is when a large considerable section of the population who are unemployed and have the will to work but cannot find employment. To keep their body and soul together, they become underemployed and pass into the lowest strata of the class structure which is the lumpen class. In *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850) Engel further clarifies the reason for this unemployment was due to depopulation of land. Barrow following Engels writes,

> "[...] The historical origin of the lumpenproletariat
>
> typically begins with the depopulation of the land,
>
> which turns a large segment of a social formation's
>
> population into rural paupers and beggars or into
>
> migratory and casual agricultural workers; most
>
> importantly, depopulation drives large numbers
>
> of people into the cities, where the existing mode
>
> of production is unable to absorb their surplus labour." (Barrow, 2020, p. 65).

Clyde Barrow asserts that the origins of the rural lumpenproletariat in capitalist social formations begins with large scale consolidation of agriculture and the same is true for the urban lumpenproletariat where the parameter is industrialization (Barrow, 2020, p. 65). Thus, operation Barga, while trying to empower the agrarian proletariat, became the ground for a new social formation and creation of a new class structure.

3.3 The Party Society: The rise of Lumpen Cinema

Clyde Barrow foregrounds the political and cultural characteristics of the lumpenproletariat. Firstly, their political actions are always attached with some other classes or even the proletariat

(Barrow, 2020, p. 136). They always suffer from a lack of "inherent destiny", a sense of belonging nowhere in the social structure. Barrow clarifies that this "is a by-product of capitalist development – a castoff on the scrap heap of history" (Barrow, 2020, p. 136). Eventually they stick to any political affiliation without any ideological basis for validation and to whomever pays them well. Secondly, while analysing the cultural characteristics of the lumpenproletariat, Barrow describes that they exist on the fringes of a capitalist society as a surplus by-product of capitalist development (Barrow, 2020, p. 109). He foregrounds Marx's invocation of the French word *la bohème*[14] (Barrow, 2020, p. 114). Marx uses this word to indicate a collective term to signify the undesirable traits of the lumpenproletariat. According to Barrow, the reason for Marx's invocation of the term is to implore the concept of a "status group with a particular style of life existing on the margins of capitalist society" (Barrow, 2020, p. 114). Barrow further elaborates, that the status situation and lifestyles are informed by the "absence of any direct relation to production" (Barrow, 2020, p. 114).

After a few years of CPI(M) coming to power in Bengal, political ideologies in rural populations had started to transcend caste, religion, and ethnicity-based organisations (Bhattacharyya D. , 2009, p. 60). The political parties attempted to resolve all spheres of familial, cultural, and social conflicts. The acceptance of political parties was such that they were regarded as nothing less than moral guardians. This is what created a "Party Society" in Bengal, and gradually drove the CPI(M) to become the party of the elite, eventually reaching

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[14] Clyde Barrow remarks that, "At the time Marx and Engels were writing, the concept of la bohème had not yet taken on the popular connotation of the romantic, carefree lifestyle associated with such artists as Toulouse-Lautrec". For Example, see Barrow, Clyde The Dangerous Class: The Concept of the Lumpenproletariat p. 114.

an epoch of *ruling intellectual force*[15]. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels remark that in every epoch the "ruling ideas" correspond to "the ideas of the ruling class" (Marx & Engels, 1974, p. 64). The ruling class is a class which has simultaneous disposal of both the material force of the society as well as the intellectual force. But this was not the resolution with which the left front was elected. Their primary resolution was to establish "a state dictatorship *of* the proletariat"[16] but over the years it transformed into a state dictatorship *for* the proletariat.

A section of recruits to the ranks of the party society were also from lumpenproletariat because it kept growing as the proletariat decomposed due to the continuous breakdown of the industrial and economic infrastructure of Bengal. They were being used by the political parties as disposable surplus and also as the "bribed tool of the reactionary intrigue" (Barrow, 2020). The gradual Lumpenization of an ever-increasing population started getting reflected on the screens of Bengal. This began an era of Lumpen cinema in Bengal. The aesthetic and narrative style which was prevalent for so long all thorough the Bengal paradigm disintegrated completely. A new form of melodrama emerged which was completely detached from social realities. Their production quality deteriorated heavily forcing many film journalists to define this phase of Bengali cinema as "crisis narrative" (Nag & Bhattacharya, 2011, p. 18). They were considered misfits catering to the lumpen class which challenged the "urban spectator's discourse of culture" (ibid).

On 7th December 1984, Anjan Chowdhury releases *Shotru* (Enemy, 1984). about a police officer (Ranjit Mallick) trying to fight against criminals of a village. The film apes the

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[15] The concept of the ruling intellectual force explains the cultural context of West Bengal especially if we emphasise cinema. Since every aspect of an individual life in Bengal was being governed based on party lines the effect of a ruling class materialised across the society resulting in the ruling intellectual force becoming a dominant force in the cultural space.

[16] For Example, see Article II of the part constitution of the CPI(M) available on its website.

lurid action-narrative style of Hindi cinema. Anugyan Nag and Spandan Bhattacharya remarks that the common emphasis made by film scholars that *Shotru* marked this beginning of a new kind of cinema which catered to a certain rural audience. But Nag and Bhattacharya traces the end to a few years earlier when Suken Das released *Nayan* (Eye, 1977). According to them, Chowdury simply emulated what Das had started (Nag & Bhattacharya, 2011, p. 16). And with this the Bengal paradigm completely faded away from existence and was replaced with the lumpen cinema.

In the city the producers and distributors were trying to find a formula for a "dedicated viewership" (Nag & Bhattacharya, 2011, p. 16). Nag and Bhattacharya argue that distributors were trying to find a new genre of films because they wanted to compete with the rising spectatorship of video cassettes and television. However, their argument fails to consider the changing social conditions of Bengal. Cinema spectatorship had declined considerably. The dream of a secular socialist democratic republic was disintegrating rapidly. Due to the closure of heavy and medium industries there was huge unemployment in the cities. The agrarian proletariat who migrated into cities added more pressure to the already existing unemployment. The Naxal insurgencies followed by the national emergency all added a detrimental effect on film spectatorship which distributors and producers wanted to reclaim.

A section of the *"Buddhijibi"*[17] in the city grabbed this opportunity. Filmmakers such as Sukhen Das, Bireshwar Chatterjee, Anjan Chowdhury, later succeeded by Swapan Saha and Haranath Chakroborty, unapologetically went on making cinema which was considered "vulgar" and "crude" (Nag & Bhattacharya, 2011). The films were derivative and cliched, aping the 3-Act structure, song and dance, action and happy ending formulae of popular Hindi cinema being produced out of Mumbai. But with a lack of infrastructure and investments in the

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[17] In Bengali Buddhijibi = Buddhi + Jibi; Buddhi means Intellect and Jibi means making a living out of

Bengali film industry, what it ultimately became was nothing short of B-Grade Bollywood in Bengali. With the vulgarisation of Bengali cinemas, the Bengal paradigm gradually lost favour. Urban audience detested watching the mainstream Bengali films and new nomenclatures such as "Shustho Cinema"[18] or healthy films (Sengupta A. , The Clandestine Cinema of Bengal: Genesis, Evolution and Praxis, 2021) and "Oshustho Cinema" or unhealthy films came into existence. It created a division of films based on spectatorship, with the urban centric films of Goutam Ghose, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Aparna Sen and later Rituporno Ghose considered "Shustho", and rural centric films made by Swapan Saha, Anjan Chowdhury etc were termed "Oshustho". For example, the same year as Anjan Chowdhury's *Shotru* was released Goutam Ghose released *Paar* (The Crossing, 1984). *Paar* depicts the story of a labourer, Naurangia (Nasseruddin Shah) who was alleged to have killed the brother of the landlord during a protest. The film depicts the journey of Naurabgia and his wife Rama (Shabana Azmi) trying to hide from getting arrested. While *Paar* retained the aesthetic and production qualities that was informed by the nostalgically reminiscent Bengal paradigm, while *Shotru* lacked production finesse. It was trying to get back to the primordial aesthetics of Jatra which proved to have immense success with the rural population (Pal, 2004, pp. 16, 17) .

The Buddhijibis thought of themselves as members of a specialized class; a section of the entire population who are there to make decisions on all aspects of life including economic, cultural, political, and ideological for the *"bewildered herd"* (Chomsky, 1991, p. 13). If the

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[18] While talking with Dr Anindya Sengupta over an interview for this thesis, he describes that by late 1980s a new terminology of "Shustho Chobi" or healthy cinema came into existence. It was a term coined by the cinephiles of Kolkata who detested the vulgarisation of Bengali cinema and drew comparisons with the films of Ray, Sen and Ghatak. "Shustho Chobi" usually were films that were urban centric and tried to sustain the aesthetics of the Bengal paradigm. While the rural centric films which vulgarised the aesthetics of Bengali cinema were termed "Oshustho".

mass can be converted into mere spectators it serves as a perpetual profit maximization system, where the spectators would never question the legitimacy of the films produced and the producers would keep maximising profits. According to a news report published by an Indian daily, The Hindu, filmmakers like Haranath Chakroborty, were earning five times the investment for each of his films, which came as a boon for the investors of these films who were corporate capitalists (Dutta, 2004).

This binary of one category of films made for the rural audience later dubbed as "commercial films" and another category of films for the urban audience is still prevalent in Bengal although all films are made out of Kolkata. However, with the dominance of internet and streaming platforms in the new millennium, this binary is slowly becoming redundant. With the spectre of a new millennium, changing class relations will further impact the Bengali cinematic landscape.

3.4 The Economic Liberalization: Postsocial Bengal

The onset of neoliberal strategies from 1992 saw India became an open market for foreign investment and foreign transfer of capital. Bengal too (still under the CPIM) saw an ushering of transnational capital and was reinvigorated by neoliberal strategies. Cinema was not spared, and the era triggered a reshaping of the Bengali film industry that cast wide-ranging effects on the Bengali films that were being produced.

In 1992 Dr. Manmohan Singh, the then finance minister of the P.V. Narasimha Rao national cabinet spearheaded the liberalization policies of which foreign direct investments

were an integral part[19]. Foreign goods flooded the Indian market. The bourgeoisie, petit-bourgeoise and the professional-managerial classes had more options to choose from. They can now watch Hollywood movies in the comfort of their homes. Television became ubiquitous. Along with an influx of television in households, private channels flooded the screens with options for home viewing

Television and VHS saw a significant departure of cinephiles from the theatres due to their disdain with the rise of the lumpen films as the dominant cinema of Bengal. The national television channel Doordarshan broadcast the cinema of the past and parallel cinemas of Shyam Benegal, Govind Nilhani and others including European art house fare on certain days. This era of television created a generation of filmmakers, academics and cinephiles who considered television as their film school (Sengupta A. , The Clandestine Cinema of Bengal: Genesis, Evolution and Praxis, 2021). So even though the Bengal Paradigm was dead – television allowed for its effects to continue burning. This is one of the factors of the existence of filmmakers like Pradipta Bhattacharyya and Aditya Vikram Sengupta who could access the Bengal Paradigm retrospectives through television.

By 2003s and 2004s the film exhibition spaces all over India witnessed a revolution. Multiplexes started becoming establishments of urban leisure. According to a 2010 KPMG report published by the Confederation of Indian Industry, admission prices of these multiplexes were ten times the average cost of a ticket to a regular cinema (KPMG, 2010). The government accorded leniency to the owning corporations ranging from tax rebates and subsides. States like Maharashtra and Delhi established laws whereby the multiplexes can charge ticket prices

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[19] See for Example: Economic Liberalization and Indian Economic Growth: What's the Evidence? By Ashok Kotwal, Bharat Ramaswami and Wilima Wadhwa. Source: Journal of Economic Literature , December 2011, Vol. 49, No. 4 (December 2011), pp. 1152-1199. Published by: American Economic Association

based on market forces of demand and supply. Although economic socialization was the primary motif of the CPI(M), but with markets now open they were forced to reconsider. The policies of the CPI(M) became more capital friendly as they had to compete with other states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat whose neoliberal policies attracted investment from the capitalists and which in turn drained the labour base of Bengal. The contradiction of ideologies which resulted from the neoliberal policies which the CPI(M) undertook, caused a departure from an epoch of "actually existing socialism" (Sebestyen, 2009) to an epoch of what Arif Dirlik calls "postsocialism"[20] (Dirlik, 1989, p. 34). Dirlik while analysing the adoption of capitalism in China in the late 1970s writes,

> "China, seeks to admit capitalism into
>
> its socialism only on condition that
>
> capitalism serve, rather than subvert,
>
> national autonomy and a national self-image
>
> grounded in the history of the socialist
>
> revolution." (Dirlik, 1989, p. 34)

Dirlik further elaborates that the outcome of this situation will depend on what arrangement arises when the two social and economic systems meet. He conceptualizes this departure from socialism to a new epoch in China as postsocialism. This is concept is important in understanding what occurred in Bengal since the beginning of the new millennium. The journey towards a postsocial discourse of Bengal corelates with that of China. The left regime

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[20] Arif Dirlik first coined the term in 1989 while analysing the condition of China since it took its neoliberal reforms. Postsocialism is not a Marxist conception of socialism. It is an academic connotation used to refer to the decline of socialism caused due to the introduction of capitalist social reforms. It is a disruption of the actually existing socialism.

in Bengal began with a socialist revolution and a promise of a social economic policy which was similar to that of China. But with the opening of markets and influx of capital both of regime had to depart and reconsider their ideologies which were dictated by the market. Sure, what was happening in China in the late 1970s was happening in Bengal a couple of decades later but that was because the neoliberal polices in India were adopted a lot later than the rest of the world. This market dictated policies were affecting the cinemas of Bengal along with everything else. Ying Xiao while analysing the cinemas of China in the postsocial era of neoliberal globalization writes,

> "Market as a new cultural logic and a
>
> Dynamic integration of transnational capita
>
> fostered around the neoliberal axis become the
>
> major forces reshaping a wide range of economic,
>
> political, and cultural lives in postsocialist China." (Xiao, 2011, p. 157)

The same "neoliberal axis" was dictating the cinemas of Bengal. Its presence created corporations which were controlling the exhibition and distribution of the films. With a shift of the Bengali film industry on a "neoliberal axis", the effects of this liberalisation had far reaching effects on the Bengali class relations too. Globalization and liberalization fragmented the class structures further. This resulted in the creation of a new class of what Guy Standing describes as a "class-in-the-making, if not yet a class-for-itself, in the Marxian sense of that term" (Standing, 2011, p. 7) – the Precariat.

3.5 The Symptom of Liberalization – The Precariat

Guy Standing in his monograph "*The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*" defined and coined this class as the Precariat. While explaining the formation of the class Standing observes

that the inequalities which were fostered by the globalization resulted in further fragmenting class structures but, Standing remarks that "class did not disappear" (Standing, 2011, p. 7). So, more fragmented class structures were formed, and the precariat originates from that fragmented class structure.

While elucidating on the class structure of the precariat, Standing categorises the class structures into a descending order of hierarchy. First there is the global elite, then there are the salariat, the managerial class which enjoy fixed salaries, pensions, and other welfare benefits. Below the salariat lies the class of what Standing labels as 'proficians', it conjugates the idea of a "professionals and technicians but covers those with bundles of skills that they can market, earning high incomes on contract, as consultants or independent own-account workers" (Standing, 2011, pp. 7,8). Beneath the proficians lie the proletariat, and underneath them are the Lumpen class of unemployed or underemployed.

Standing while describing the class characteristics of this class describes the precariat as a group of people who unlike the salariat "have minimal trust relationship with capital or state" (Standing, 2011, p. 8). He further elaborates that,

> "And it has none of the social contract relationships of the
> proletariat, whereby labour securities were provided in
> exchange for subordination and contingent loyalty, the
> unwritten deal underpinning welfare states"[21] (Standing,
> 2011, p. 8).

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[21] During the era CPI(M) governance in Bengal various policies were undertaken which provided labour protection which operated like a welfare state. For example, new policies like providing social security to workers by introducing the provident fund scheme for unorganised sector. This was the first scheme of its kind in the entire country. It also provided financial assistance to labours of closed tea factories and manufacturing companies. Construction workers were also included under the social security schemes.

As a social status Standing describes the precariat to have a "truncated status". It neither belongs to the upper status of the professional nor middle status of craft occupations and according to Standing had a gestation period from the globalisation era of 1975 to 2008 (Standing, 2011, p. 26). The development of the growth of the precariat occurred due to the "policies and institutional changes of that period". Standing states:

> "Early on, the commitment to an open
>
> market economy ushered in competitive
>
> pressures on industrialised countries from
>
> newly industrialising countries (NICs)
>
> and 'Chindia' with an unlimited supply
>
> of low-cost labour. The commitment
>
> to market principles led inexorably towards
>
> a global production system of network enterprises
>
> and flexible labour practices." (Standing, 2011, p. 26).

The two main class formations that occurred in Bengal post-independence were the lumpenproletariat and the precariat. While each of them lies in a different social position within the class hierarchy, (i.e., the precariat lies above the lumpenproletariat) they share some similarities while exhibiting their class characteristics. Both were a result of contemporary inequalities, or in other words while the origination of the lumpenproletariat can be traced back to the migration of landless farmers to the city from the 1960s, the origination of the precariat can be traced back to the liberalisation and globalisation of the late 20th century which gave rise to income inequality. But both branched out as a fragment from an already existing class structure -the proletariat. The lumpenproletariat and the precariat both are the decomposed proletariat which according to Standing is a "shrinking core of the manual employees, the essence of the old 'working class'" (Standing, 2011, p. 8). But both are different when the

implication of labour arises. While for the precariat, Standing implies the "lack of secure work-based identity" (Standing, 2011, p. 9), Barrow, while translating Engels, implies lumpenproletariat as "people without a definite occupation and permanent domicile" (Barrow, 2020, p. 68). Thus, the precariat has a narrative of labour although it does not have any security or dignity of labour attached to it, while the lumpenproletariat lacks the narrative of a definitive labour altogether. Standing further clarifies that the lack of hope of a social integration makes the idea of the precariat lie very close to the "Marxian idea of a lumpenproletariat" (Standing, 2011, p. 9) but have distinguishing factors.

3.6 Cinema of the new millennium

With multiplexes growing at a steady rate, a phase of what I would like to call "The Remake Films" can be observed. Due to a pan-India approach of the multiplexes, rather than creating original content, filmmakers from West Bengal like Raj Chakraborty, Raja Chanda, Baba Jadav etc., were remaking films from the South of India. This was an evolutionary extension of the lumpen films which converted into remakes to satisfy the market conditions set by the multiplexes. Although ticket prices were high in the multiplexes, an average of 50-60 percent occupancy per screen in the multiplexes was recorded as opposed to 30-35 percent of singleplexes (KPMG, 2010, p. 65). The increased footfalls in the multiplexes unvaryingly reduced the footfalls of the singleplexes causing them to close[22] across the city and Bengal and to sell off their properties to land promoters which were either converted into more multiplexes or residential properties.

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[22] For Example, see Chatterji, S. A. (2019, August 31). *National.* Retrieved from Citizen Matters: https://citizenmatters.in/kolkata-death-of-single-screen-theatres-in-age-of-multiplex-13788

Meanwhile, there was radicalization in the lifestyle of Bengal too. By the mid first decade of the new millennium internet and digitization gradually began to revolutionise the social and cultural environment of Bengal. Filmmakers did not have to depend on the conventional methods of filmmaking and film distribution anymore. Such a transformation supported filmmakers like Q, Pradipta Bhattacharya, Aditya Vikram Sengupta and many others to reach out to their desired audience which in turn gave them the desired returns to keep on creating more films. Cinema had the potential of not being concentrated in the hands of distributors or exhibitors, and audiences need not make a journey outward into the public to their local cinema theatres to watch films. Rather filmmakers could now use the P2P[23] sharing platforms to exhibit their films directly into bedrooms of individuals. The transformation challenged and alienated traditional modes of film production and distribution. Q's critically acclaimed *Gandu* (Q, 2010) was first released on a P2P platform where it had one of the highest seeds and peer counts. *Gandu* never had any theatrical release anywhere in Bengal or India. Pradipta Bhattacharyya's first feature film *Bakita Bayaktigoto* (Rest is Personal, 2013) even after winning a national award was pulled down from the theatres and the majority of its audience watched the film online on YouTube. His films are now distributed on OTT[24] platforms. Aditya Vikram Sengupta faced the same fate with his films. *Asha Jaoar Majhe*

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[23] P2P or Peer-to-Peer is a technology which allows free and efficient means of transferring documents, media, and anything that can be stored. For Example, Carmen Carmack defines the P2P as a "software program to locate computers that have the file you want to have."

[24] OTT media platform stands for Over-The -Top media platform which is offers audio visual content to the audience via the internet. According to Natalie Jarvey, the OTT "escapes the (television) subscribers and causes rating to decline." For Example, NETFLIX, Amazon Prime Videos, Hulu, etc. In India NETFLIX was launched in January 2016.

(Labour of Love, 2014) was pulled down from cinemas just after a couple of day's release and now he has all his films on OTT platforms.

Along with the disruption in the distribution the exhibition pattern, modes of film production also changed. Digital technologies and equipment replaced their analogue counterpart. QUBE cinema[25] was introduced which changed the projection system, so the remaining of the singleplexes either had to adopt the changes of DCP[26] projection system or perish for good.

This created a series of films which could draw larger audiences so that the objective function of profit maximization could be maintained. The narratives of this mainstream cinema suited multiplex audiences who were also offered frame by frame remakes of South Indian films. Apart from these, a certain kind of urban cinema, made by Rituporno Ghose, Goutam Ghose, Aparna Sen, Anjan Dutta and others created urban centric narrative structures which catered to the educated middle-class families of Kolkata. These were the films which were trying to keep alive the past glory of the Bengal paradigm by instilling themes of realism, and aesthetics that affirmed the paradigm. These urban films were a product of the postsocial materialist conditions of Bengal. But unlike the Bengal paradigm, these filmmakers were detached from the contemporary social realties of Bengal.

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[25] QUBE cinema is digital cinema distribution technology which originated in India. QUBE works as a DCP distribution system which operates as a server fed film projection.

[26] DCP stand for Digital Cinema Package, which is basically a technology which stores a collective of digital files that can be used to transfer digital cinema.

3.7 Conclusion

The film industry was burning off on both ends; economic and artistic. The industry was being consumed by corporate aspirations and nostalgia of the past glorious era of Bengali cinema. From the vestiges of this burning industry rose a disruptive class of filmmakers who had the necessary information to use this new capital[27] to their own advantage without compromising or building an alliance with opposing forces. This form of disruption, which scholar McKenzie Wark calls *abstraction* (Wark, A Hacker Manifesto, 2004, p. 14), marks the rise of the Clandestine movement in Bengal. The detailed idea of abstraction, its characteristics and its premise will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

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[27] By new capital I mean digital technology and the digitisation.

Chapter 4   The Rise of the Clandestine

If the greatest trick of the devil was to persuade us that the devil does not exist, then maybe the greatest trick of capitalism is to gull us into imagining that there is nothing but eternal capitalism.   *-McKenzie Wark*

(Capital is Dead)

The inception of the Clandestine occurred at a significant epoch of radicalization in Bengal's politics and society. The CPI(M) was gradually losing its relevance in the social and cultural constructs of daily life and its influence on the Bengali film industry. With the change in distribution, exhibition and production patterns, narrative themes were also changing. Brinda Bose and Prasanta Chakravarty observe that the narratives which dealt with the "relationship between labour and work vanishes" (Bose & Chakravarty, 2012, p. 131). They further observe that this change also challenges the "mainstream, communist, nationalist and other modes of asceticism" (Bose & Chakravarty, 2012, p. 132). This chapter explores the social relations and formation of a new class which will influence the rise of clandestine cinemas in Bengal.

4.1 The Death of a Social Utopia

Since its very inception the political left in India and Bengal always had an intellectual and ideological base. However, intellectual support started to decline when India adopted an open market policy. In West Bengal, the CPI(M)'s decline can be attributed to the compromises that they undertook in their policies, but much of their decline is also the loss of their intellectual base on which the party depended for over three decades. Censorships and predominance of the "party society" forced a large section of CPI(M)'s support base to withdraw their support

from the party including that of artists, authors, poets and intellectuals. The last nail in the coffin was the 2007 Nandigram land acquisition agitation. The chief minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya had allegedly ordered the police to open fire on the protesters who demonstrated against land acquisitions. After this incident, several processions and demonstrations led by intellectuals and artist condemning the policies of the CPI(M) made this split public. With the ideological spilt, the electoral base of the CPI(M) weakened.

Although released a couple of years later after CPI(M) lost electorally, Raj Chakraborty's film *Proloy* (Disaster, 2013) depicts the political violence that became a social reality in the final years of CPI(M)'s governance. A sense of social responsibility drives an idealist village schoolteacher, Binod, (Paran Bandyopadhyay) to rise and protest against the party, but he fails to keep his faith of his pre-existing party ideology in place. The film is inspired from the true incidents of Barun Biswas, a social activist from the Sutia village who was murdered for protesting against the atrocities of rape and murder committed by the hired hands of the local political leader. Raj Chakraborty not only dramatizes the social reality which plagued Bengal but also portrays an ideological dilemma of between Binod's relationship to the police and his decision to take things into his own hands. The film is a testament to a rising generation whose ideologies have become disillusioned due to the breakdown of the institutional edifices of Bengal. The loss of faith instilled in the schoolteacher Binod, is just one of the many examples of educated intellectuals who were enraged by the functioning of the party in its final years. But this enragement due to an experience of moral betrayal paved the way for a different intellectual and popular culture inclination. The new inclinations centred around the cult of "*Ma, Mati, Manush*" (Mother-Earth-People), a slogan made from the platform of the Nandigram land protests by Mamata Banerjee. What is needed to be marked here is that a discourse of the mother cult which was missing from the leftist ideologies is not born as what Bose and Chakravarty describes as "sentimental nationalist rhetoric" (Bose &

Chakravarty, 2012, p. 131). Finally in 2011, the Trinamool Congress led by Mamata Banerjee, and her party was elected as the chief minister of West Bengal. The intellectual and ideological spat between the leftist government and cultural icons paved the way for a right-wing autocratic party like the Trinamool Congress to gain power in Bengal.

   At around this time the internet was making significant inroads into Bengal. There was a substantial demand for the internet especially in the urban population even though the internet speed was slow, and the prices of the connections were high. The high price and slow speed did not have any effect on aggregate demand. Owning a computer with an internet connection became a status symbol. The internet data usage for India rose from 2.81% of the total population in 2006 to 7.50% of the total population in 2010 (Roser, Ritchie, & Ortiz-Ospina, 2015), i.e., a leap from 30 million users to 90 million users in just four years, consequent to the population rise from 1.165 billion in 2006 to 1.234 billion in 2010. In these four years there was a proportionate rise in the ratio of internet usage to population even though GDP per capita income kept fluctuating. In 2008 it slumped to a - 2.9% (Capita, 2022) due to the world recession, but the internet usage confirmed an inelastic demand to every economic downturn. The internet revolution which began in individual, private, spheres, soon became a social experience with cyber cafes and gaming parlours becoming a trend among the youth and adult populations. The digital culture from a social perspective is depicted significantly in Q's film *Gandu* where the protagonist frequents a cybercafé to play video games but in effect to satisfy his voyeuristic pleasure of watching a woman in an intimate video conference with her long-distance boyfriend. The scene illustrates the kind of surveillance culture which would be used as a state machinery to curb dissent in the future. It signals the movement of private spaces into public spheres as opposed to collective ones.

The internet and digitization were effectively transforming film viewing and film making experiences. The P2P revolution enabled filmmakers to make films without too much consideration of market conditions. Digital equipment and tools made production much more affordable than its analogue counterparts. Digital transformation afforded filmmaking some liberation from the dictatorship of the market. This led to a burgeoning of filmmaking activities which threatened the ascendency of dominant cinema. The digital technologies enabled filmmakers to produce films made on shestring budgets subverting the traditional narrative structures, traditional aesthetics of contemporary Bengali films and at the same time maintaing high production values.

4.2 The Clandestine: Perceptions through Abstraction

To substantiate that specific kind of films which were being produced by the end of 2010s in Bengal are a part of a Clandestine movement, primarily we have to justify the relationship between the evolution of capital and how this evolution resulted into formation of new class relations corresponding to the mode of production in Bengali cinema. By mid 2011 a new political party after 34 years of the CPIM came to power. The new decade in the millennium brought in more radical propositions and transformation of class structures. Guy Standing observes that this transformation is caused due to a fragmentation of the industrial class structure and calls it 'globalisation class structure' (Standing, 2009, p. 98). In the industrial era, the 'working class' including the agrarian working class and urban proletariat influenced the intellectual discourse and policies of the state. But with globalization that class gets fragmented. According to Standing, " we cannot analyse the changing sphere of work and labour without coming to terms with the new classes and forms of social and economic stratification" (Standing, 2009, p. 98). Therefore, there rises the necessity of an enquiry into

these new classes. Interrogations around what should the determinants of these classes and capital in this neo epoch and how should it be defined has been matter of analytical studies for thinkers like McKenzie Wark and Standing. The Hacker Manifesto, written by Wark, broadly analyses how capital through abstraction transformed into something else, creating with it new social relations and thus new classes.

The significant factor which can be attributed to this new epoch is the transformation of capital into data or information. It is a resource utilised by the ruling class as a leverage that one has over its predecessor or successor (Wark, 2004, p. 25). But to understand information as the new capital, first the concept of *abstraction* and its relationship with capital and modes of production should be addressed. McKenzie Wark's *The Hacker Manifesto* explains abstraction as a process of creating new perceptions, new concepts, and new disruptions by hacking from the raw data. She calls this "hacking from abstraction" (Wark, 2004, p. 13). What this means is, whatever new or abstract is being created is created out of a process of creating disruptions in the existing system and mining out new information from a universal set of information already present. Everything that we create or produce or innovate are basically the products of abstraction by hacking. Wark calls those people employed in the process of abstraction as the Hacker Class in her book. Two questions which arise at this point is what exactly has capital been abstracted to and how filmmakers have been able to hack the existing essence of capital to produce the Clandestine cinema in Bengal?

Wark insist that all abstractions historically begin with the abstraction from nature which produces a certain productive potential in the world. According to her, land was detached as a resource from nature, as a characteristic of productive potential of nature, abstraction rendered it in the form of property. Wark while analysing this abstraction from capital writes:

"Just as the development of land as a productive resource

creates the historical advances for its abstraction in the

form of capital, so too does the development of capital

provide the historical advances for the further abstraction

of information, in the form of intellectual property

[…] What abstraction hacks out of the old feudal carcass

is a liberation of these resources based on a more abstract

form of property, a universal right to private property This

universal abstract form encompasses first land, then

capital, now information. " (Wark, 2004, p. 18)

The contemporary world is a matrix of information, Wark manifests information to have vector properties, i.e., it is has a transferable aspect to it which progresses from one material support to another in a geometry which is "simply a line of fixed length but of unfixed position" (Wark, 2019, p. 41). The asymmetry of information creates a more contemporary class struggle between what Wark calls the vectoralist class and the hacker class.

The class that "owns the means of production" (Wark, 2004, p. 59) is defined by Wark as the vectoralist class. The only difference between the vectoralist and the capitalist or the pastoral classes are the modes of production. Wark observes that while the capitalist class "possess factories and forges" or the pastoralist "possesses pastures or farmlands", the vectoralist class possess "stocks, flows and vectors of information". But other than that, the vectoralist class exhibits same traits as the other class. Wark confirms that usually all these classes "extract surplus from the productive class" and this surplus is required for the continuity of the class. The classes along with their corresponding surplus have evolved over three historical phases, i.e., pastoralists (landowners) correspond with rent (as surplus), capitalists with profit us and vectoralist with margin surplus as each surplus is based on a more abstract

form of property. This accumulation of surplus by the vectoralist evoke a class struggle between the ruling vectoralist class and the productive class – the hacker class.

The above analysis of the vectoralist class now creates a base to discuss the concept of the hacker as a class. I will now discuss how the filmmakers of the Clandestine movement belong to this class and the characteristics that they share with this class.

4.3 The Clandestine: A Hacker Paradigm

The vectoralist class which is the new ruling class owns the means of production which can generate new information through various restraints. Copyrights, patents, censorship, etc are the tools with which these restrains are exercised and flow of information is controlled. The hackers through abstraction try to liberate from this new "feudal carcass"[28] universal right to private property.

For example, if we consider the example of Q, his works are heavily influenced by the digital cinema revolution that occurred in the west. Thus, the aesthetical inspirations which he draws upon largely conform with the transglobal postmodernist films like *Baise Moi* (Despentes, 2000), *Pi* (Aronofsky, 1998), or films from the Dogma 95 movement. These films usually deal with themes of psychological derangement, of explicit physical violence and sexuality. Q's *Gandu* too conform to such themes. Q was aware that the censorship laws and the film exhibition model in Bengal and India would not allow the explicit sexuality and the psychological derangement which *Gandu* depicts to be shown. Q "hacked the information"

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[28] For Example, see McKenzie Wark, A Hacker Manifesto, p. 18

subverting censorship by releasing it on the P2P platform and within weeks *Gandu* was all the rage. Subhajit Chatterjee while explaining the Q's altercation with the censor board[29] writes,

> "Anticipating censorship hostility and the lack of a
>
> distribution network for hardcore or extreme content in
>
> India, the film was never submitted to the censor board"
>
> (Chatterjee, 2017, p. 210).

The film was not banned, because there was never an attempt made for the film to be played in cinemas, but an abstraction from the existing exhibition system enabled the film to reach its desired audience. Furthermore, another atypical feature of this film was its radical and anarchic black and white milieu making it an appropriate production to be distributed through piracy. *Gandu* was made on a shoestring budget which was funded by Q himself through his production collaborative called Oddjoint.. A few months after its release on P2P platforms and a few private screenings, Q finally met with Belgian producer Celiene Loop at a private screening at a SRFTI (Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute) screening of the film. Celiene later became a producer of the film and many of Q's upcoming projects. The film finally was finally submitted and premiered in the Panorama section of the 60th Berlin International Film Festival.

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[29] The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) is a statutory body within the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in India. The body regulates on the basis of provisions made in the Indian Cinematograph Act 1952. The Article 19 (1) (a) of the Indian Constitution provides rights to every Indian citizen of "free speech and expression", but at the same time the CBFC evokes Article 19 (2) of the constitution to subject films to "reasonable restriction" on the basis of the state security, sovereignty and integrity of India, public order, decency and morality, etc. See for example the website of CBFC. But more than often the interpretation of Article 19 (2) is made based on the ideologies of the party in central government.

A few years later, while attempting to produce *Bakita Bayaktigoto* (Rest is Personal, 2013), Pradipta Bhattacharya, found out that Q had used a DSLR (Canon 7D) to shoot *Gandu*. Bhattacharya who was facing severe financial crisis used the DSLR as his new hack to create a hybrid aesthetics through DSLR which was a cheaper alternative to the cine cameras. Both the filmmakers had minimal funds, resources, and the capital means to produce the films. The important thing to point out here is that even though all the three filmmakers do not own the means of production they still able to produce. All the filmmakers operate from a vulnerable position in the production chain making their labour precarious. But the possibility of abstraction (by which they hack the existing capitalist systems) distinguishes them from the precariat and makes them a part of the hacker class. According to Wark an important characteristic feature of a Hacker is that, for a Hacker there is always a possibility of a surplus:

> "a surplus of possibility expressed in what is actual,
>
> the surplus of the virtual. […] what is real but not actual,
>
> what is not but which may become." (Wark, 2004, p. 44)

Wark further elaborates that the virtual is an "inexhaustible domain" which makes the possibility of a hacker to extract "virtual into the actual, to express the difference of the real" (Wark, 2004, p. 44). Wark defines the 'actual' as "what is not but which may become". Therefore 'actual' is lies beyond the 'real' which is extracted from the virtual, and this difference between the two creates a difference in productivity for the hacker – in this case the filmmakers. In addition to that, the capitalist system tries to veil or hide the presence of the 'actual' by foregrounding the narrative of the 'real', which the hacker tries to subject through forays into the virtual. As capitalists extract the surplus of profits and vectoralist extract the surplus of margins, similarly the hacker extracts the surplus of the virtual. The extraction of the surplus virtual creates a surplus of possibility which empowers the hacker class to continue functioning.

Another important feature which Wark describes bout the hacker class is that it never complies with any alliances of mass politics which might constrain abstraction. Wark uses the term "productivity of differences" (which is generated due to the hacker's ability to go beyond the 'real' and abstract the 'actual') to illustrate the motivating principle of the hacker. Although productivity[30] is conventionally regarded as an economic dimension, but in the context of clandestine I would like to interpret productivity as a measure of creative performance that compares the production value of the clandestine films to the production value of the dominant cinema.

Wark observes that the hackers never adhere to the politics of the mass. The hacker rejects alliances of the mass politics because it possesses high probability of "supressing creative, abstracting forces". So, this abstention from the mass politics acts as a liberating factor from the control of that politics. Wark further elaborates that the hacker "hacks the politics itself" which transforms the discourses of mass politics.

For example, Sengupta's first feature *Asha Jaoar Majhe* was made on minimalistic budget with a handful of crew members not engaging with the cine federation or a production facility. When the film was taken down from the theatres due to the disagreement with SVF, Sengupta refused to distribute any of his films further in Bengal. Rather he hacked the present politics of film distribution and the operations of the dominant forces by extracting the possibilities of distributing the films abroad through international film festivals and OTT platforms. Thus, there is always a gap in the value of production between the dominant cinema and the clandestine which informs the "productivity of difference."

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[30] For example, the definition foregrounded by the United States Bureau of Labour Statistics is that productivity is a measure of economic performance that compares the volume of output to the volume of input. For Example, see (101, n.d.)

Sengupta, Q and Bhattacharya have not produced a single film by cooperating with SVF or any other studio in Bengal. Their films are not representations of mass aspiration, rather they operate in the fringes which gives them and their films a clandestine appeal. Wark elaborates this idea in Hacker Manifesto as,

> "The hacker interest cannot easily form alliances with forms of mass politics that subordinate minor differences to unity in action. Mass politics always run the danger of suppressing the creative, abstracting force of the interaction of differences. The hacker interest is not in mass representation, but in a more abstract politics that expresses the productivity of differences." (Wark, 2004, p. 29)

The politics of Q, Bhattacharyya and Sengupta are not what can be associated with 'political films' – they are not activist films or show the possibilities of political action. Rather they exploit the politics of filmmaking in contemporary Bengal by subverting the dominant politics and creating new possibilities of filmmaking.

4.4 Clandestine cinemas of Bengal

There is a constant pressure from the ruling intellectual force to keep these films away from their intended audience. For example, *Bakita Bayaktigoto* (Rest is Personal, 2013) was pulled down from the theatres within just a week of its release (Bag, 2014) even after the film was awarded the National Film Award for best Bengali feature. His subsequent film *Rajlokhi O Srikanto* (Rajlokhi and Srikanto, 2019) was only screened in seven theaters in the whole of Bengal, and it was was pulled down after just five days. Aditya Vikram Sengupta's *Asha Joar*

Majhe (Labour of Love, 2014) even after winning various international and national accolades was not allowed to run in the theaters for even one full week by the distribution channels, which is regulated by SVF. His latest film *Once Upon a Time in Calcutta* (Sengupta A. V., 2021) was subject to constant interference from the Federation of Cine Technicians and Workers in Eastern India which heckled crew members during production (Chakraborty S. , 2021) because they refused to work on the agreements of the Federation. Those agreements include regulations around legitimate crew members, the number of crew on a production and the percentage of the budget set aside by as a commision to the Federation. Since these filmmakers always work with a small crew and budget, it is not feasible to abide by the terms of the Fedearation.

The films, soon after their disruptive releases, gather a cult following and an appreciation from the cinephile community nationally and globally. Even after such accolades, the presence of these films is very faint. Sengupta asserts that the rulling intelectual force suffers from an inferiority complex that if films with such low budgets perform exceptionally both on the artistic and economic fronts, then the audience might cease to watch their large scale, mindless, and profit maximizing ventures (Sengupta A. , The Clandestine Cinema of Bengal: Genesis, Evolution and Praxis, 2021).

Not just big production houses but even the government plays an influential part in this performance of secrecy, by constantly amending the film censorship legislations and appointing party lackeys as the heads of such institutions[31]. In 2021, the central government of

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[31] For example, Pahlaj Nihalini, one time producer who later became CBFC chairperson in 2015. Even after various controversial statements made against free speech, banning of films enjoyed government support to continue as the chairperson. He was later replaced by Prasoon Joshi who also allegedly has close ties with the ruling BJP party. Similar appointments has also been carried out in the prestigious Film and Television Institute

India passed new laws for OTT platforms and social media which would interfere with the independence of content creation by actively monitoring all the content on the OTT platforms and what people express on these platforms (Ellis-Petersen, 2021).

Since inception, content on OTT platforms was not regulated by the government because internet and its regulation did not fall under the perview of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. But with the new legislations incorparted under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, forgrounds the role of the government as watchdogs which the minister Ravi Shankar Prasad terms as a "soft touch progressive institutional mechanism" which is important in keeping the "security and sovereignty of India, public order, and rape or any other sexually explicit material" (Press, 2021) from external (western) influences. But these comments are just another tool to push into secrecy the films or any audio-visual content that do not comply with the ideals of the ruling intellectual force.

Since 2011, the influence of SVF over Bengali cinema and television increased exponentially. SVF, which has close ties with the party in power, TMC, consolidated properties constructing multiplexes and gaining ultimate production, distribution and exhibition in eastern India. Journalist Jayanta Gupta has written about SVFs forceful acquisition of the Kolkata Port Trust property for construction (Gupta, 2015). The SVF through this consolidation of land is operating as rentier capitalist. Various allegations have surfaced regarding the closure of cinema halls, disrupting screenings of films that are produced without its auspices and wage theft. The director of SVF was arrested in 20 for alleged financial fraud of 250 million rupees (Das S. , 2019). However, the news has suppressed by the mainstream media and there has not

of India (FTII) where Gajendra Chauhan – a devout and announced BJP supporter was made the dean. After various protests and demonstrations by the students, Gajendra was finally removed from the position.

been any follow up coverage. SVF still functions in its full capacity and has spread its influence beyond cinema to music, digital media, news and intellectual property rights syndication.

4.5 Conclusion

There is just one major production house that runs like a corporation which controls the production and distribution of all Bengali films, the SVF. It supports filmmakers who are willing to compromise their creative and ideological motives and come to terms with the corporation. But as discussed earlier the important feature of the Clandestine movement is that the filmmakers do not usually give in to compromises. They are not submissive to the ideologies or pressure of a mass politics. This is the reason why even after such exploitation and supression these filmmakers are able to make their films and reach out to their desired audience. This makes the case study of Bengal from the perspective of the clandestine a signigicant one.

Chapter 5   The Clandestine Films

In the previous chapter, I accounted for the rise of the Clandestine though a social analysis of the political crisis in Bengal from 2010. In this chapter I perform close reading of three films: *Gandu* (2010) directed by Q, *Asha Jaoar Majhe* (Labour of Love, 2014) directed by Aditya Vikram Sengupta and *Bakita Bayaktigoto* (Rest is Personal, 2013) directed by Pradipta Bhattacharyya and I will construct an analysis of "new realism"[32] in their aesthetics and narrative structure. I examine the social contradictions that structure these films. I argue that the films illustrate the class struggles of contemporary Bengal in their narratives – depictions which are absent in the dominant cinemas of Bengal.

5.1 Gandu – The Riddim of the Street

The film was first released in 2010, a time which marks the end of the social utopia that was promised by the CPI(M) when they gained power Bengal in 1977. Rather disenfranchisement and lumpenization became the social reality at the onset of economic liberalisation (Chatterjee, 2017). *Gandu* presents itself as a testament of its time and voices the angst in the form of protest through image and sound. With slums and representation of dirt and filth, the film projects the breakdown of the contemporary socio-political structures of Bengal. Its dark and grim pallet,

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[32] The concept of "new realism" is discussed in detail while discussing about the Hindutva hegemony, communalism and rise of plutocracy in Chapter 2.

the nonlinear structure, scenes of drug abuse and social exclusion, anarchic dialogue and lyrics create a cinematic expression representing the total chaos of contemporary Bengal. Gandu (Anubrata Basu) the eponymous protagonist of the film is a lower-middle-class school dropout living in the suburban districts of Howrah. Howrah during the industrialisation phase of Bengal boasted many jute mills, factories and medium and heavy industries. Over the years, a majority of the industries shut down[33] creating a surplus population of the proletariat ready to be decomposed into the dangerous class of the lumpenproletariat. Now the landscape of Howrah is littered with slums, unplanned buildings, narrow roads and an overflowing sewage system. Q's decision to set *Gandu* within the racked landscape of Howrah, foregrounds the lumpen milieu in which Gandu functions. Like the lumpenproletariat, Howrah as location also lies on the fringes of the capitalist metropolis of Kolkata. The cinematic aesthetics which the film invokes thorough its black and white images in the lumpen milieu of Howrah catalyses an emotion of shock and revulsion.

Q's choice of this cinematic aesthetics is informed by his influences of a more subversive and radicle order of world cinema. In an interview given to Arnesh Ghose, Q emphasises his life fascination while observing the "works of beautifully perverted minds like Oshima and Pasolini" (Ghose A. , 2016), he goes on to elaborate,

> "I admire artists who have utilised shock as a tool
> to break the ennui of an otherwise fatigued world
> around them. I was initiated into this world through
> the works of Tom Tykwer, Mike Figgis, Michael Haneke,
> Lars Von Trier, Werner Herzog and other European directors.

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[33] The reasons for the shutdown of industries in Bengal have been discussed in Chapter 2 and 3 in detail.

However, it was the style of the Asian masters like Oshima,

Miike and Kim Ki Duk that influenced me more." (Ghose A. , 2016)

But beyond filmmakers Q also describes to be persuaded by a wide range of artist, authors and poets like "the words of Anaïs Nin, the images of Araki or D'agata, or the artworks of Shinto Kago have informed me about various aspects of sexual representation. However, the main impetus has always been human, and my own experiences" (Ghose A. , 2016). Q's implementation of a cinematic shock which disrupts the conventional approaches of cinematic aesthetics evoking a more eccentric narrative style which distinguishes him from the other filmmakers of the clandestine.

The film begins with a split screen vox populi of the word Gandu to unveil the volatility of the signifier Gandu. For some Gandu means *stupid*, or *fucker*, and for others it is *loser* or *moron*. This arbitrary connotation of the name establishes a class displacement of the primary character of the film into a clandestine space. Devasundaram states:

"Gandu is unveiled not only as the object

of a fractured self, but also of a socio-economic

reality that denies him a locus, a sense of identity,

even on the nomenclatural level of a conventional,

socially acceptable name." (Devasundaram, 2018, p. 186).

In an interview with Devasundaram, Q explains his decision of using such an arbitrary name for his character and film as creating "a linguistic shift which is critical to social change" elaborating:

"We have successfully baptised a Shudra

["untouchable"; lowest caste] word and

made it if not a Brahmin [highest caste]

at least a Kshatriya [caste directly below Brahmin]

word. It is an upper-caste word now!" (Devasundaram, 2018, p. 187).

The word Gandu is typically an abusive term associated with disgust or derangement, hurled against the lumpenproletariat. But an interesting facet about Gandu (the character) is that he is not only a part of the lumpenproletariat, but also shared the attributes of a hacker. He has dreams of becoming an international rapper and his rap forms the main soundtrack of the film. The rap which accompanies the opening credits informs the spectators about the nameless and marginalised status of Gandu:

"You make me feel like a worm.

You can call me an asshole

Since I don't have insurance,

Ambition is high, my future dark

You get angry when I go hungry,

They tell me your life is worth more than mine

But one day I'll haunt you like a ghost,

You will be balloon and me a safety pin."

The lyrics denounces the audience with a sense of struggle, a struggle of that class which Barrow describes as, "generating little trust and few loyalties" – the lumpenproletariat. Gandu is aware of the "parasitic, violent and prostituted culture" (Barrow, 2020, p. 115) he belongs to, and the profound intensity of an explosion which the lumpenproletariat as a class can create. He is also aware his position as the "bribed tool of reactionary intrigue" (Barrow, 2020, p. 72) which will haunt them (the audience, society) once he gets a chance. Gandu blames the society and his social realities for his marginalised status and his constant emasculation. In the rap the signifier- 'You' become more associated with society in general. The minimal trust with and the angst that Gandu has for 'You' gets stronger as the rap progresses. But the rap is also a pliant for his dejection:

Love. Love. Shame Shame

Blame game begins,

Love is on rent for a bundle of money

Round the Bloody year, you fuck my ass,

Future punctured, Present absent

Mayhem every day.

Filthy words, dirty streets

This is my life,

My songs are burnt,

My heart a Crematorium

My words are broken and decomposed.

I am fucking serious,

You think it's a Joke?

It is not difficult to extend Gandu's feeling of hopelessness to that the Lumpen as a class exhibit. Gandu offers no optimistic solution for his struggle. He rejects any scope for improvement because he is aware of his present being "absent" and future being "punctured". The lyrics creates a sense of frustration and hopelessness of being "excluded from participating in society by the very process of "modernization" and capitalist development" (Barrow, 2020, p. 165).

Gandu is in a state of mental fracture because of his personal and social emasculation which arises from the constant neglect and abusive behaviour from his peers and his mother's (Kamalika Banerjee) neglect and apathy towards him. Gandu's mother too ekes out a living as lumpenproletariat by providing sexual services and stealing from Dasbabu (Shilajit Majumder), the owner of the local cybercafé, to sustain her household. Gandu not only

witnesses their sexual activities but also steals from Dasbabu. Thus, both mother and son conform to the traits of the lumpenproletariat.

Gandu roams around the town as a socially secluded being, gambling and watching pornography. Gandu is seen to scribble in his diary which is later revealed to be his desire to become a famous rapper. One day, Gandu meets Ricksha (Joyraj Bhattacharyya), a rickshaw puller in his locality. Ricksha lives in the slums and shares the same social reality as Gandu. He too is pushed into a socially marginalised zone. Gandu and Ricksha becomes friends - forging a brief alliance of the lumpenproletariat.

Ricksha due to his labouring status belongs to the Shudra community, or the community of the lower caste who historically have lived outside the villages and towns. The way the caste hierarchy functions is through apportioning the most abject manual labour to the Shudra and the Dalit communities. Gandu does not belong to the same caste as Ricksha. But Q designs the milieu of these two characters in such a way that due to the social realities of contemporary times both of them come to share the social identity of the lumpenproletariat.

Ricksha like Gandu shares the same symbolic order of namelessness. Ricksha shares his name with his labour. Although the two friends share the state of namelessness, "their marginalisation occurs according to different Indian contexts of socio-economic and class stratification" (Devasundaram, 2018, p. 187) . In a scene where Gandu is complaining about his life's frustrations, Ricksha ignores him. Gandu confronts Ricksha by asking him to pay some attention to his complaints; to which Ricksha cynically replies, "What has it to do with me? I provide labour. I provide labour in exchange for my food. Not like you, stealing money from Dasbabu". Ricksha is pointing out their class difference through proudly proclaiming his association with labour. Ricksha is trying to claim his connection with the proletariat, unaware that he no longer has claims to that class. Gandu seems to be more aware of this in his rap about Ricksha:

Riksha-wala your game is on night and day,

Game is on throughout the day.

No time for fucking tears,

You pull and pull the burden of the society,

Your stretched fit body paints picture of the street,

Rhythm rhythm of the street.

However, he also demonstrates empathy in the lyrics, as opposed to the grim and pessimistic lyrics when Gandu is introduced. This marks the memory of proletarian struggles that have been a part of the history of Bengal. But it is only nostalgia as the irony of the whole situation is that even if Ricksha is claiming his proletariat status, the social realities have decomposed into the rotting class of the lumpenproletariat.

Identity and sense of self are important themes in the film. A scene which depicts Gandu's ego ideal is where Ricksha and Gandu are sitting on a window of a delipidated construction site. Gandu asks Ricksha, "Hey Ricksha, if I fall from here, will I die? To which Ricksha replies "Your mind is completely fucked!". Subhajit Chatterjee identifies this scene and the dialogues as a "middle class vertigo which is defined in cultural rather than economic terms" (Chatterjee, 2017, p. 211). Chatterjee elaborates by saying that,

"Such narratives of downward mobility often

map secret urban histories, drawing attention

to platforms of exchange between the middle

and the lower strata of society that are under

the constant vigil of state and civic apparatuses" (Mehrotra, 2009).

Ricksha's reply to Gandu is a commentary on the social reality that he as a disaffected youth encounters every day. Gandu laments in his rap of his present and future to be "completely fucked". Ricksha is correct that Gandu is deranged but it is not Gandu's mind

that is the issue. The real no longer makes any sense. It is Ricksha who is engulfed in the illusion, still believing in reality. That is why Q appoints the 'hero' of the film as Gandu. As he has no illusions like Ricksha, he is freer. He no longer sees any authority in reality itself: all that is solid has melted into air.

The film depicts a world that is off kilter. In scenes of drug induced states, Q invokes the Goddess Kali as a motif throughout the film. Kali in Hindu mythology is regarded as the goddess of time (Kal means time) – but not of linear time, embodying both creation and destruction in a single moment. She also does not conform to the more benevolent gods or goddess. Kali is black, drinks blood, resides in crematoriums and is always practically nude. She is the symbol of female virility in a patriarchal society (Heaphy, 2017). Kali stands out in the marginalised section in relation to the other Vedic goddess. According to Sumita Chakravarty, depiction of Kali is symbolic to the "in-between stage dividing day from night, the human from the sub- and superhuman realms, the socially marginal . . .from the well-to-do" (Chakravarty, 1993, p. 6). However, this 'in-between stage' has become the standard.

Kali is also the patron goddess of Kolkata. According to many scholars Kolkata, (the anglicized version of the Bengali word Kalikata) derives its name from Kalikshetra or the "Ground of Kali" (Banerjee-Guha & Sinha, 2022), although there are various other myths about Kolkata's name. In Kolkata and all over Bengal Kali is regarded as the archetype of "divine mother" even after the anti-ethical agency attached to her. Thus, Kali in the film also symbolises Gandu's emasculation, both by his mother (representing his oedipal struggle) and his social emasculation by the city itself. The constant social and familial castration creates a desire for liberation, but Gandu is trapped. The inability of liberation creates a sense of guilt which this decomposed class of lumpenproletariat as a class suffers from. As Lacan writes, "the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one's desire"

(Lacan, 1992, p. 314). The supergeo pressure that Gandu experiences is not illusory but Real[34] (Žižek, 2007, p. 81), i.e. they are not mere nightmares or drug induced hallucinations but a metaphorical allagory of the social struggles of a class which is situated in the margenilised and clandestine space.

After the film's release there was quite a stir and some print media claimed it to be "the first sex film of India with full frontal nudity" (Dasgupta P. , 2010). There have been varying degrees of criticism and rejection from the mainstream media for the fact that the film has an elaborate 8-minute sex sequence which is against the customs and traditions of Indian morality and nationhood where sexual representation is still considered taboo. Q structures the sex sequence towards the end of the film as a protest against the rejection of desire which is a narrative upheld by the dominant forces of cinema and mainstream media. Brinda Bose and Prasanta Chakravarty while analysing the propensity of dominant forces to reject sex as taboo state:

> "Sexuality then becomes more a question,
>
> of probing relationships merely as transgressive
>
> and therefore punishable, rather than as serious
>
> and complex with tension, frisson, desire,
>
> roughness, and pain." (Bose & Chakravarty, 2012, p. 132).

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[34] Here Real does not mean social reality or real experience. But in Lacanian terms it is the real demands, the real aspirations and desires which cannot be fulfilled and always because of the Symbolic Order of the Ego Ideal always dictates individuals how to socially behave, which laws to abide by. So, the superego is the reservoir of all the unfulfilled desires and dreams.

Bose and Chakravarty observe the lack of a "sociology of desire" in the current narratives of dominant cinema. Q's elaborate sex sequence is a protest against the rejection of desire. A rap that follows the sex sequence rages against this sexual repression:

He looks so lost holding on to his dick

I'm sure even you feel it sometime,

A quick jerk off is very common.

Now let's check what Horihor is up to,

With tits ass cunt fuck on top of his mind

The stream of fantasies that never end,

So, listen up Horihor, shake it real hard.

Shake your dick hard Horihor,

Fucked by morality,

Chased by desire,

The whole worldwide is wanking off,

So, wrap your palm tight and shake it hard.

Before Gandu visits the sex worker, Ricksha encourages Gandu to have sex, "You just write lyrics about ass cunt, etc., go and fuck first." To that Gandu replies, "If I fuck, I will fuck her brains out. I will fuck out all the frustrations that I have". The entire sex sequence is a commentary on the frustration of youth in the sexually repressed social structure of Bengal and India. As it is alluded in the rap, "fucked by morality and chased by desire" creates a dilemma which is the cause of sexual tension. While the entire film is in monochrome, the sex sequence is in colour. The scene marks the possibility of liberation from the emasculation Gandu experiences from monochromatic social relations. Later in the sex sequence and for a brief period Gandu's imagines having sex with his own mother when the prostitute transforms into an overlaid image of his mother. This portion of the sequence

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reflect the repressed, unfulfilled libidinal drives that creates a psychological conflict between the material world and an illusion- one which is a construction of the superego.

India is going through demographic transformation. More than half of the population is under 25 years old. With the growing demographics of young population, Q's examination of ruptured identities and fragmented sexual desires which is often supressed and ignored by social structures makes the sex sequence relevant.

5.2 Labour of Love: Love of Labour

A dark screen. Against its background a news bulletin is read out as if it is from a television. The news bulletin proclaims around 1200 people had lost their jobs in West Bengal in various sectors. The news bulletin fades away and a shehnai plays Raag Tilak Khamod – the raga of the night, a customary raga played during Bengali weddings. Within a few seconds of the film's opening, Aditya Vikram Sengupta conjugates a marriage against the backdrop of an unemployment infested Kolkata. *Asha Jaoar Majhe* ((Labour of Love, 2014) captures the life of a married couple who hardly meet each day in the process of making ends meet. Like *Gandu* this film too is a testament of the breakdown of contemporary Bengali society but unlike *Gandu, Asha Jaoar Majhe* romanticises the past glory of a social utopia that was promised for the proletariat. The Husband (Ritwick Chakraborty) works nightshift in a newspaper factory and the Wife (Basabdatta Chatterjee) works the dayshift in a manufacturing company and come together only in brief, transitory moments.

Set in postsocial Kolkata, the interesting feature of this film is its use of silence; silence which has become an ideological characteristic of the contemporary generation. With political violence, economic inequality, and cultural hegemony an entire generation has been forced into a state of precarity- the class of working poor with insecure employment (Standing, 2011, p.

9). Sengupta characters epitomises this class "associated with status discord" (Standing, 2011, p. 10). The result of this 'status discord' is silence, i.e., the absence of protest - protest against unemployment, protest against labour and income inequality. In the film the protests are only heard as background voiceover. For example, in the scene where the Wife returns from work in the evening, we hear off-screen slogans:

Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight!

Fighting is the only way of survival!

Fight for labour and income will continue.

Long live revolution,

Long live revolution.

The shehnai accompanies the sloganeering giving it a tone of melancholy. But the shehnai also become a motif of desire accompanying the wife as she sits idly gazing aimlessly, as if recalling and contemplating a nostalgia which might never return. When the sloganeering fades out abruptly, we are left in utter silence once again. The sound design of the film plays a significant role in capturing the social milieu of contemporary Bengal. Sloganeering is a common soundscape in Kolkata which also plays a significant part of the soundscape of the film. Sangeeta Datta elaborates,

> "News about the mill closure, the mill
>
> worker's suicide and the demand for
>
> accountability, are all familiar soundscapes
>
> of a city overseen by a leftist regime for many decades." (Datta, 2018, p. 236)

The sound design is nostalgic for a bygone era where labour could protest against its exploitation. But due the change in social relations, the new class of the precariat has descended into silence.

Asha Jaoar Majhe's appeals to an aesthetic of timelessness, depicting an abandoned Kolkata - of a gradually dying city. Bose and Chakravarty while analysing the urban cinema of contemporary Bengal points out two existing paradigms for the city of Kolkata on which narratives are based. They observe that on one hand there is narrative of the "'living city', throbbing, resilient, the once-and-always cultural centre with significant colonial residue" and on the other hand there is a narrative that invokes the irony of Dominique Lapierre's 'City of Joy' as a "'dead city', crippled, wounded, surviving on borrowed time" (Bose & Chakravarty, 2012, p. 130).

While the narratives of dominant cinema incline to the former, trying to disguise the social relations, and alienating spectators from the truncated social reality, Sengupta chooses the latter. He creates a dreamlike construction of a city which has been surviving on borrowed time. The film invokes the essence of an aesthetics familiar from Andrei Tarkovsky's masterpiece *Stalker* (Tarkovsky, 1979). The timeless, dilapidated, cinematic rendition of the 'Zone' can be brought to comparison with the aesthetics of Kolkata in *Asha Jaoar Majhe*.

Sengupta cast an eerie silence specially while capturing interior soundscape of the couple's house. The only sound is the faint and ambiguous sound coming from the neighbourhood. Like the concept of Tarkovsky's 'Zone' Bengal is also facing the same failures of industrial development causing a crisis of unemployment and decomposition of the proletariat. Sengupta captures the lost spirit of Bengal by drawing ideological parallels from the cinemas of the Bengal paradigm especially from *Mahanagar*. The progressive ideological narrative in Ray's *Mahanagar* where labour is associated with a liberal dogma, where the husband and wife both work to sustain their livelihoods is similar to *Asha Jaoar Majhe* but Sengupta captures the broken fragments of that same ideology. Ray's *Mahanagar* along with social struggles also reflected the familial struggles manifested through the joint family structure of the working class which in Sengupta's narrative has been replaced by a nuclear

familial structure. Thus, Sengupta draws s from the narrative structure of the Bengal paradigm only to depict its breakdown.

Asha Jaoar Majhe's literal translation is *In Between Arrival and Departure*. The literal moment of this translation appears at the very end of the film. In the film's last sequence, the husband arrives back from his night shift as the wife is preparing to leave for her dayshift. In that brief moment that they meet Sengupta dramatizes it as a dream sequence where the brick walls dissolve into a deep pine forest covered in mist. The dream sequence functions like ideology. Žižek while analysing ideology remarks that an ideology is not a dream-like construction, but a reflection of the real social relations, he elaborates,

> "Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion
>
> that we build to escape insupportable
>
> reality; in its basic dimension it is a
>
> fantasy-construction which serves
>
> as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion'
>
> which structures our effective, real social relations" (Žižek, 2008, p. 45).

Sengupta uses this 'illusion' of a dream reality which helps to unmask the traumatic reality of social 'antagonism' (Žižek, 2008, p. 45). The dream sequence acts like a remedy from "a traumatic social division which cannot be symbolised" (Žižek, 2008, p. 45). The couple are deterred from meeting each other because of the capitalist system of labour exploitation. The trauma is projected as a desire to meet each other and they do so in a dream construction which unmasks their traumas and reflects the social reality. While the end sequence of Ray's *Mahanagar* asserts the birth of a new dawn which will bring progress by exclipsing the old, the end sequence of *Asha Jaoar Majhe* asserts the disintregration of that same ideology which Ray has hoped for.

Another inportant aspect of the the film in the realtionship of the couple is 'labour' that they perform for each other. Various scenes in the film demonstrate this labour, for example the wife cooking meals for the husband, the husband completing household chores, the wife keeping a close eye on all the small details of husband's needs (for example, when she stitches husband's torn trousers). The labour that they perform for each other is pure, unabstracted labour for creating use-values as opposed to labouring for exchange value for capitalist expansion. Their labour for love still rekindles the hope for survival among the inhabitants in a city which has lost all narratives of labour and all realtions to labour.

Sengupta's choice of cinematoc aesthtics reverberates more with the global, film festival audience. In an interview to journalist Mariana D. Richter, Sengupta while talking about the importamce of film festival in his carrer remarks,

> "[…] it was the Venice Film festival that
>
> discovered me, and it kind of validated me
>
> and gave me insurance that what I am doing
>
> is probably the right thing. It made me much
>
> braver as a filmmaker." (Richter, 2021)

At this point, one can draw both parallels and differences between the filmmaking techniques of Q and Aditya Vikram. Parallels can be drawn between their distribution and exhibition politics, since both Sengupta and Q have an international, film festival, art house audience. However, there are major differences when it comes to their respective choice of cinematic aesthetics to draw these audiences. While Q uses more radical techniques such as noisy-distorted images, rapid cross cuts, jerky hand held camerawork - which casts the audience in a state of shock. But Sengupta's choices gravitate more towards a traditional and conformist approach of cinematic aesthetics. The use of long takes, steady and composed shots, using

music as a mottif to evoke emotion - or in other words, Sengupta chooses a more symbolic approach to filmmaking – carefuly curated for the international film festival audience.

In an interview to filmmaker Suman Ghosh, when asked about his cinematic influences that manifest in his own work, Sengupta answers that,

> "Satyajit Ray, Tapan Sinha, Tarun Majumdar.
>
> But I cannot watch Ritwik Ghatak's films. I
>
> Don't like them. I don't know why? I feel
>
> guilty at times, but I cannot sit through most
>
> of his films." (Sengupta A. V., 2015)

This sheds light on his cinematic choices. Considering Ritwik Ghatak as the most radical (because of his noncomformist politics and experimentation with the cinematic language) filmmaker among the Bengal paradigm filmmakers, so, by rejecting the influence of Ghatak, Sengupta tends to lay his influence which towards a more conformist cinematic choice. A choice which is evdent in *Asha Jaoar Majhe* and his later work *Jonaki* (Firefly, 2018).

5.3 Rest is Personal – A social portrait of rural Bengal

Unlike the previous two films Pradipta Bhattacharyya's feature film *Bakita Bayaktigoto* (Rest is Personal, 2013) weaves a narrative around the rural social milieu of contemporary Bengal. The film is a hybrid of fiction and non-fiction filmmaking. Although *Bakita Bayaktigoto* differs from *Gandu* or *Asha Jaoar Majhe* in its narrative style, it follows a similar pattern of constructing the narrative around the enquiry of class relations and class structure. Bhattacharyya creates a montage of characters who have ceased to be represented in dominant Bengali cinema. According to Sanghita Sen, the film represents "real people both from the working-class as well as from the middle-class, in rural and urban contexts in postmillennial Bengal"(Sen S. , 2019).

The film begins with a Bargadar being asked the question about his per day income. The Bargadar replies "100 bucks[35] per day". The next couple of minutes we witness various interviews of social actors across all sections of the society around similar questions of survival and happiness. Bhattacharyya creates a juxtaposition of binary opinions between the urban and rural and positions the spectators through these questions that reveal social relations. The opening credit of the film is accompanied by a Baul[36] song:

"Near my abode, there lies the city of mirrors,

Where my neighbour resides.

But alas even if the city is so near me,

---

[35] Less than AU$ 2 per day

[36] Baul is a community of wandering minstrels indigenous to rural West Bengal and Bangladesh who sing songs of social transformation and are considered to belong from a "a socio-economically and politico-religiously marginalized cultural population". For Example, see Uttaran Dutta and Mohan Jyoti Dutta article titled, Songs of the Bauls: Voices of Margins as a Transformative Infrastructures.

I have failed to meet him even for once."

'Home' here is metaphor for the city of Kolkata and the neighbour is the metaphor for the rural population which although adjacent lies in its blind spot – an alienation of representation which the rural population has been subjected to in dominant narratives. A major portion of the first half intercuts the questions of happiness, love, complaints, likes and dislikes of the people from the city as well from the village. But the vital feature of the film extends beyond the portrayal of answers to the questions to transcend the boundaries between the urban and the rural (Sen S. , 2019).

Pramit (Ritwick Chakraborty) the urban protagonist of the film, embarks upon a journey with his cinematographer, Amit (Amit Saha) to find out how people fall in love, finally travelling to a village of love called Mohini. The question the film proposes the question of love, i.e., what is love also why and how people fall in love? This is an interesting question within the socio-political context of India of the time. In2013, at the time the film was being released, India was being gradually being hegemonized by the right-wing agents of Hindutva, and within a few months of its release the BJP came to power. Questioning the concept of love when love jihad [37] is gradually becoming the social reality of India gives it a political force. Sen claims that the film constructs a "utopic imagination" adding that:.

> "Since the idealism that Mohini
>
> embodies is not fantastic but a realist
>
> imagination of a better and inclusive

---

[37] Love jihad is a conspiracy theory purported by the right-wing agents of Hindutva. The agents of Hindutva allege Muslim men are targeting Hindu women by luring them into love affairs and then kidnaping and forcefully marrying them. In India love jihad had taken various innocent lives of people who were mob lynched or tortured or killed.

society with potential to accommodate

class, caste, gender, and cultural differences,

it becomes a befitting component of the film's

social realist style" (Sen S. , 2019).

Bhattacharyya uses documentary tropes such as interviewing real subjects on streets of Kolkata and the village, handheld framing of shots which is frequently out of focus and scenes lacking continuity. Simultaneously, he is also constructing a fictional world as the film challenges "the rigid dichotomy of real versus non-real and the distinction between reality and illusion in the cinema" (Rushton, 2013, p. 3). Conforming to an aesthetics of hybrid cinema. creates a "distancing of the audience from objective truth while illuminating a kind of concentrated reality" (Robertson, 2016). The fictional village of Mohini is the fictional world where the protagonist finally travels. This distances the audience from the objective reality but in hindsight bringing in front of the audience a montage of characters and their conflicts which is the concentrated reality which have been alienated from the narratives of the dominant cinema.

Bhattacharyya creates a structural quality through this hybrid narrative that becomes effective to pose different regimes of truth against each other. For example, the interviews illustrate the enquiries of pertinent questions regarding labour, income, caste hierarchies and social relations. In other words, conflicts, and how these conflicts have manifested through history. The hybrid narrative brings out those 'truths' when placed against each other. But hybrid aesthetics also "confound official history, private recollection and simple fiction" (Marks, 1994, p. 245). Thus, the film creates a dual image, one is the "actual image" (Bergson, 1988) which corresponds to the present or the actual time that it captures. For example, the interviews, the folk dances and various rural activities. On the other hand,

Mohini acts like a "virtual image" (Bergson, 1988, pp. 36-38) which corresponds to the past that is preserved and signals to a future to come.

In the course of shooting for his interviews, Pramit one day encounters a deceitful street astrologer who promises to reveal to him the secret of love in exchange for some cash. The astrologer sequence bears resemblance to a scene in Mrinal Sen's 1981 film *Chalchitra* (Kaleidoscope, 1981). Dipu (Anjan Dutta) while trying to write a story for his newspaper assignment encounters an astrologer similar to *Bakita Bayaktigoto's* Pramit. Both astrologers exhibit similar fraudulent behaviour of cheating their customers by making false claims about their future. Both of them live in the slums which represents the underbelly of Kolkata, thus both Sen and Bhattacharyya categorise the astrologers as representative of the class of the lumpenproletariat. But Sen does not allow his protagonist to empathise or trust the astrologer who wants the favour from Dipu to feature in a television channel. But Pramit on the other hand agrees to trust the astrologer by exchanging money in return of the location details of the village of Mohini. This difference in opinion of the two protagonist signals hegemony of the lumpenproletariat of contemporary Bengal and India. Dipu's rejection of empathy towards the astrologer – a representative of the lumpenproletariat, signals a lack of trust. This mistrust arises because the narrative of Sen's film is conforming to an era (1980s) where the class of lumpenproletariat has not yet evolved fully to a dominant class. Whereas in Bhattacharyya's narrative is set in an era (post 2010s) where the lumpenproletariat is a social reality in Bengal.

Once the film progresses to the point where Pramit and Amit reach Mohini, Bhattacharyya disposes his audience into the social realities of rural Bengal. The audience is introduced to the farmer, the fisherman, the weaver, the village school master, the village marriage registrar, even a sequence of 'Hapu' where a man whips himself to entertain rural audience in exchange for food. But amongst all the rural activities that Pramit participates in and learns about, the enquiry regarding class relations and social struggles remain in the

forefront. For example, in one scene the marriage registrar is asked about his grievances. He replies, "the interreligious marriages between Muslims and Hindus are still not accepted in the society". Another is when the 'Hapu' performer complains about the pain which he bears while performing his act, but states he has no other choice because this occupation has been handed to him by his ancestors and he should carry it on.

The hybrid aesthetics of the film renders an aesthetics of social reality which would become profound in much of Bhattacharyya's later works like *Rajlokhi O Srikanto* (Rajlokhi and Srikanto, 2019) or even in his latest YouTube web series *Birohi* (Bhattacharyya P. , 2021). The rural society plays a very important part in all of Bhattacharyya's work. But moreover, his films are more than a cinematic experimentation, it is a social critique, and a commentary.

Another visible aspect of Bhattacharyya's work is a departure from the monolithic cinematic practices of the dominant cinemas of Bengal. He creates this disruption by introducing "fantasy within the real" (Ghosh, 2019). With this choice he subverts the environment of alienation manifested by the forces of dominant cinema. Film critic and journalist Sankhayan Ghosh writes that this choice "helps him get away with the limitations of low budget, which is a choice he has made to enjoy full creative freedom" (Ghosh, 2019). For example, even when he was given the option for shooting with the industry standard RED camera, Bhattacharyya chose to shoot with the Canon 7D which made the production much cheaper. With a lighter camera the lucid handheld camera movements became easier to achieve which gave *Bakita Bayaktigoto* its distinctive hybrid aesthetics. Not only that even with music film's music director Anindya Sundar Chakraborty creates a reflexive and "deeply personal" (Ghosh, 2019) mode for the film. The baroque style of music along with folk music which are amateurishly recorded all stand opposite to the conventional approach of filmmaking practiced in the dominant cinemas. While the dominant cinemas rely more on the market dictated

preferences, Bhattacharyya stand contrary to that preference giving *Bakita Bayaktigoto* a feeling of departure from the more industrialised production of Bengali cinemas.

5.4 Conclusion

All the three films that are discussed in the chapter deal or in some way explore the theme of love. For example, in *Gandu* the relationship between Gandu and Ricksha depicts brotherly love as exemplified in the scene where Gandu dreams of sleeping with Ricksha in peace cuddling him like a lover. In *Asha Jaoar Majhe* although couple's romantic union is never depicted directly, it is through their unabstracted labour they experience the love for each other. Finally, in Bakita Bayaktigoto, love has been explored directly as a material relation. But the question of love is critical in contemporary Bengal? In the last 40 days there has been a report of 15 alleged rape cases (Chakraborty S. , 2022) in different parts of Bengal. In the month of March, in the village of Bogtui around 10 houses were set ablaze and people were charred to death in their own house (Boral, 2022). All these incidents have been alleged to the leaders of the political party in power. It is clear that the precedent of a 'party society' which was nurtured by the CPI(M) has not faded away even after a decade has passed since the end of CPI(M)'s governance. In fact, the model of the 'party society' has been further perfected by Trinamool Congress for their own benefit which has intensified the political violence and deteriorating of social indices. As discussed before people of Bengal lost faith in their ideologies during the last years of CPI(M) government. They paved the way for a new leader, a new hope that could help them out of this crisis; but the fact is that faith was never restored, rather it worsened. Thus, at this crucial time when people are in state of disenchantment from the political parties, losing faith in their own ideologies, love

becomes critical. Narratives of love that foreground social relations are rare making these films important.

The cinemas of the clandestine reflect the social relations of contemporary Bengal. Each one of them are aesthetically distinct, does not follow the same methodologies of film production or distribution from each other but draws similarities in their narratives which are rooted in social realties. Also, these films due their virtue of experimentation with form, structure and narrative styles demarcates them from the dominant cinema practices of contemporary times.

Chapter 6   **Conclusion**

The cinema of Bengal can be analysed through the evolving social relations of Bengal and India. In this thesis I have taken into consideration the period of social evolution from India's independence from the British empire in 1947 to the current period. Throughout the thesis I argue that the changes in aesthetics over the decades correspond with the changes in social relations, economic conditions of the state and political and cultural hegemony.

I have demonstrated the period of the late 1970s which marked the death of a certain kind of Bengali cinema which I call the Bengal Paradigm – i.e., the paradigm of realism which can be recognised from the works of filmmakers like Sen, Ray and Ghatak. I associate this death to with the creation a new class of lumpenproletariat. I have also accounted for the rise of clandestine cinema, which can be traced back to the middle of the first decade of the new millennium. The rise also corresponds to the changing social relations which followed many underdeveloped and flawed policies implemented by the then governing CPI(M) party. the clandestine has also been influenced by the influx of the internet and digital technologies which made filmmaking much more accessible than its analogue counterpart. the focus of my argument is the theory of class relations which affirms the idea of "interests and power" (Chibber, 2017) associated with the Marxian theory of macro-level class analysis.

Globalization, neoliberal policies, and the hegemony of the dominant forces of cinema in contemporary Bengal has limited the scope of experimentation. Rather the present condition of cinematic practice in Bengal is inclined towards a market dictated axis which has commodified cinema and cinematic practices. The filmmakers of the clandestine are self-aware of their social relations and their cinema reflect these social realties of contemporary

Bengal. The dominant cinema on the other hand provides escape narratives which evades social realities alienating the audience from the contemporary class struggles and disruptions in social relations. But unlike other film movements, the filmmakers of clandestine do not collaborate or even share a similar perception of cinema. Rather they function from a shared experience of social realties where the dominant forces deter them from experimenting with new cinematic forms and narratives. But they subvert the forces controlling dominant cinema by disrupting the conventional cinematic production, distribution, and exhibition systems.

Q uses his cinema as tool of protest to transcend marginalization, emasculation, and exploitation of the disillusioned urban youth of Bengal. His anarchic disposition of images and sound creates a sense of mayhem which is the reflection of the deteriorating social, political, cultural and economic conditions of contemporary Bengal and India at large. Producing a milieu of silence and outlining the cynical attitude of the Bengali middle class, Aditya Vikram Sengupta depicts the conditions of urban Bengal which has lost prospects of a social utopia. His works asserts to a feeling of contemplation of a bygone era which was filled with promises of equality which has been plundered by the visceral reek of globalization and an increasing inequality of income and labour. While Q and Sengupta concern their narratives more with the urban population and urban social conditions, Pradipta Bhattacharyya's narratives include more of the rural population fand includes a rural perspective. Bhattacharyya himself is a rural migrant to Kolkata and his perspectives are very much rooted in rural and mofussil areas where he grew up (unlike Q and Sengupta who are more urbane in their disposition). Bhattacharyya evokes the practice of hybrid cinema to bring about the discourse of social relations. He directly interrogates the social realities and implements folk aesthetics to create an aura of rural Bengal which has been alienated from the narratives of Bengali cinema over many decades.

I have been guided by the theoretical frameworks of McKenzie Wark, Guy Standing, and Clyde Barrow to underpin the creation of new social classes. Even though all of them write mainly about the West, they do reference India and the East in their work. Where that is lacking, I have used Indian authors such as Raju J Das and Sharmishta Gooptu among others.

However, there have been certain limitations to the study primarily due to time constraints and the length of the thesis. In this thesis I have included the work of only three filmmakers which I present as a case study for the clandestine. But the fact is that there are several filmmakers in Bengal and in India whose narratives are informed by similar conditions that I set about for my study of the clandestine. For example, Amartya Bhattacharyya with his latest Indo-French coproduction film, *Adieu Godard* (Bhattacharyya A. , 2021). The film has won national and international awards, but the mainstream is silent about Bhattacharya's presence and practice. There are many others who can be included as part of the clandestine.

The second limitation that this thesis encounters is the limitation of representation. The films which have been analysed are made by male filmmakers who belong to a privileged social status – the middle class. Considering their caste status, all the three filmmakers are Brahmins or Kasyastha, i.e., they belong from the upper ranks of the caste hierarchy. They all have tertiary education. I also share the same social privilege, caste status and gender as the filmmakers. However, I firmly believe that our work serves to challenge such hierarchies.

This thesis lacks the representation of filmmakers from the minority, and scheduled communities which I sincerely regret. For example, the work of Farha Khatun. Her recent film *Holy Rights* (Khatun, 2020) on Islamic laws and conditions of Muslim women in right wing infested India has been praised and awarded, but it remains under the veil as clandestine

cinema. In my future work, I sincerely hope to include works by such brave and talented filmmakers.

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