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A postcolonial *iconi*-city: Re-reading Uttam Kumar's cinema as metropolar melodrama

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ABSTRACT

Since the early years of India's emergence into a 'post-colony', the possibilities of the *popular* in Bengali cinema had to be renegotiated within the complex registers offered by a severely decimated cultural economy of the region. It could be claimed that by early 1950s, Bengali cinema's negotiation of a linguistic and spatial equivalent of 'disputed' and 'lost' nation led to it trying to constantly *spatialize* Calcutta, offering several possibilities to reinterpret the metropolar *visuality in and of* the postcolonial city. Calcutta provided Bengali cinema a habitation, a metaphor of modernity and a spatial equivalent of a nation. A substantive share of Bengali cinema's *spatial turn* was within the formal configurations of *melodrama*, the talisman of which was the *star* figure of Uttam Kumar. Kumar's effortless urbanity stood vanguard to the popular-modern of postcolonial Bengali cinema, while his films also provided a sustained critique of the same. This article interrogates popular cinema from the vantage of the visualized space of the city. Drawing from space theory, melodrama and star studies, it interrogates the *nature* of the Bengali metropolitan-popular and would hope to provide a new understanding of cinema's aesthetic institutionalization and narrative function within the scope of melodrama and stardom.

KEYWORDS

Bengali cinema; Calcutta; modernity; melodrama; stardom

This essay is a *rereading of the popular* in Bengali cinema of the 1950s and 1960s. In early 1950s, Bengal was the home of a *fledgling* postcoloniality, still haunted by the social, material and psychological effects of Partition while being bound – irreconcilably – with the colonial moment that was still in near and nervous memory. Postcolonial Bengal is marked by a particular severity of crisis that would define it as ontological – a condition of *being*. Postcoloniality should *also* be seen as *epistemological*, a foundational mutation in historical knowledge that helped constitute a definitive cultural praxis. Drawing from space theory, melodrama studies, star studies and recent scholarship on cinema, the article would not only approach the habitation of the metropolitan from interpretive categories of cinema but would also interrogate popular cinema from the vantage of the visualized space of the city.

Bengali narrative cinema, three decades old in 1950, was quickly shedding its older practices of salaried actors, controlled screens, a studio-enabled scenography and a culturally codifiable audience¹ and showing an increasing, if restive, readiness to embody the emergent postcolonial cinematic subject. And that is why the cinema of the decades immediately after Partition should be seen, on one hand, as symptomatic of the nervous memory of colonialism as well as one that helped define the conditions of its complex post-colonial negotiations.– has been termed as the *national-popular*. Foregrounding of the linguistic as a basis of constituting a cultural capital was critical (as was in most other 'regional' cinema cultures in India) to contest the *notionally*

national, but there were significant other considerations that would go to finally define Bengali popular cinema. These considerations were marked by the horrors and exigency of Partition and a series of 'formative' catastrophes in Bengal (WWII, famine, riots and abject street violence) of the 1940s² and early 1950s. The possibilities of the popular had to be hence renegotiated within the limited and complex registers offered by a once-formidable pre-Partition economy that was now divided, decimated and dissolved with unmatched severity and precipitated within a territorial and communal crisis.

As the 1950s dawned, Bengali cinema's complex negotiation of a linguistic and cultural equivalent of 'disputed' and 'lost' nation led it trying to constantly *spatialize*³ Calcutta. Calcutta came to inhabit a meaning beyond its urbanity, both as an alienator and as a preserver of the middle classes, churned, as they were by territorial displacement, economic difficulties and cultural flux. In other words, while renegotiating its constituent parts as a popular *register* of cultural taste, Bengali cinema habitually located itself in the metropole,⁴ offering several possibilities of spatial reinterpretation of the metropolitan 'sublime',⁵ its visceral excesses intact. In this sense, the cultural equivalence and heft of the city in Bengali cinema emerged as not very dissimilar to what the 'capitals' of modernity, especially Paris or St Petersburg offered to the Symbolist and Formalist vanguards in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶ Calcutta provided Bengali cinema a habitation, a metaphor of modernity and a spatial equivalent of a nation. Recent scholarship on cinema has marked Nemai Ghosh's *Chhinnamul*⁷ (The Rootless, 1951) and Ritwik Ghatak's *Nagarik*⁸ (The Citizen, 1952) as landmark films marking the beginning of this period, which concludes with a sort of final testaments to the postcolonial city in a set of trilogies⁹ by Tapan Sinha,¹⁰ Satyajit Ray¹¹ and Mrinal Sen¹² between the late 1960s and mid-1970s. In between, the city is conspicuous as a scopic and visual motif in a number of films¹³ that membered the so-called new cinema of the period.¹⁴

What remains considerably under-addressed in film scholarship is that a substantive body of work in Bengali popular cinema took part in the appreciation of this significant metropolitan modernity within the formal configurations of the melodrama. Moreover, closely aligned to the interpretive provisions of city space in melodrama is the omnipresence of the *star-text*,¹⁵ the star being Uttam Kumar, who virtually *re-constituted* the semiotics of star-melodrama, at least since 1954, with the cult box office success of *Agnipariksha* (Trial by Fire, 1954). What emerges from this genre of metropolitan Bengali popular is a continuous re-enactment of the idea of the *contemporary* within the formal figuration of the melodrama, to the extent that it is almost impossible to define the contemporary city in Bengali cinema's popular mediation unless one looks at the various versions of the historical-contemporary in Kumar's films.

I have written elsewhere¹⁶ that Ghatak's early search for a language of Partition can be contrasted with his contemporaries from the popular genre, who were by the beginning of the 1950s confidently using melodrama effectively to drive home the melancholy of Partition. The years in which Ghosh and Ghatak emerged out of IPTA¹⁷ activism and turned towards cinema as the most effective cultural code to narrativize the new spatial modalities of a 'partitioned' city, Bengali popular cinema was doing the same, albeit within the generic demands of the melodrama. I was particularly interested in a comparativist spatial critique of Ghatak's debut *Nagarik* and a film like Sukumar Dasgupta's *Ora Thake Odhare* (They Live That Side, 1953), with Uttam Kumar in a key role, and to illustrate how they are concerned with similar spatial realignments of the city. Ghatak's film inevitably foregrounds the melancholy of dispossession through employment of *realism* while *Ora Thake Odhare* manages to convey, through its generic lightness and comic overture, the audacity of hope and the rewards of cohabitation. Artistically the films are different but there is little gain to be made if one automatically considers Ghatak's effort as superior to that of Dasgupta. Foundational to this claim is to reveal the emergence of Calcutta as a *cinematic city* and how both films manage to contribute and draw from this possibility.

This essay is a cultural history rather than a comparativist critique, where the idea of the *cinematic city* is of keen import, proposing a certain spatial realignment of the metropolis, in the wake of an unprecedented, post-Partition burst of multitudinal claims to the physically realizable as well as the hidden spaces of Calcutta. If that article had argued that Partition forever cinematized '50s Calcutta by cutting open its spatial and scopic 'vantages', the discussion that follows here would want to build on that claim by interpreting Uttam Kumar's cinema and his stardom as germane to the meaningful continuation of that process, at least for a decade and half more. The article hence foregrounds the encounter of Kumar's cinema with *postcolonial* Calcutta. By furthering the demands made by the new visuality of the *cinematic city*, I would want to claim that the cultural economy of the melodrama form in mid-1950s' popular Bengali cinema, looking for a new cinematic poetics, triggered a certain scopic *interrogation* of postcolonial Calcutta as a *locus primaire*. This practice, when interrogated through the semiotics of stardom, is seen to be reconfiguring the melodramatic form itself, providing new formalization of cinema's aesthetic institutionalization and narrative function within the broader cultural politics of metropolitan *postcolonialism*.

One should note that the observations made here regarding Bengali popular cinema are not unique to it. No claim is made of seeing this cinema as an esoteric practice because much of its genealogical and generic richness can be traced to influences from both Hollywood and Hindi cinema of the decades preceding or simultaneous to it. Similarly, there are several Bengali films of the period that carry meaning within its structure in a way dissimilar to those whose comprehensive critique are offered in this article. In that sense the claims, even within the repertoire of Bengali popular cinema, are neither sweeping nor *omni*-textual. What could be claimed at best is that metropolitan popular cinema, melodrama and stardom come together effectively in several prominent films of the period and indicate a certain cultural praxis. This article is an interrogation into that particular praxis. Finally, one must note that consumptive patterns and politics of star-studies, though elemental in the dispersion and dissemination of the *star* within the gravitational field of capitalist populist praxis, are beyond the scope of this article. This essay remains anchored in the narratives only and not their reception, though the latter, which calls for a different and complementary undertaking, can complete the claims that are made here.

The melodrama of modernity

Since melodrama is at the centre of this discussion, it would be imperative to begin by *defining* the idea of melodrama. Ben Singer writes that most things between the 'epistolary tale of sexual malice in *Clarissa* (1747) to the mystery-suspense film *Coma* (1978), via the turn-of-the-century tied-to-the-tracks stage thriller and the classical Hollywood 'woman's weepie'¹⁸ claim to call itself a melodrama. If this means the impossibility of defining it, it also means that the term travelled loosely and without prejudice to locations and tongues widely different from its eighteenth-century moorings in Europe. Perhaps this is what led Bill Nichols to call it an *imaginary form*, which, in his introduction to Thomas Elsaesser's seminal essay,¹⁹ he sums up as ambivalent and polyvalent, politically agnostic and internally elastic. In fact, Thomas Elsaesser's essay on Hollywood melodrama does try to address the continuation of the excessive melodramatic need for *interiority* even when divorced from its original impetus, the eighteenth-century sentimental novel. One tends to agree with the capacity of melodrama to contest entrenched systems, especially if one remembers that the earliest import of *Melo-Drame* from French to the English stage involved radical Jacobins like Thomas Holcroft.²⁰

But it would be instructive to look at a few efforts in giving the term a semantic anchor. Singer, for example, offers a cluster concept theory of melodrama, insisting that a definitive and closed terminology is, in fact, redundant. He writes,

I propose a definitional scheme that analyzes melodrama as a “cluster concept” involving different combinations of at least five key constitutive elements: strong pathos; heightened emotionality; moral polarization; non-classical narrative mechanics; and spectacular effects. Just a couple, and perhaps even just one, of these elements might prompt the designation of a play or film as a melodrama.²¹

Singer is actually discussing the form as it should be. His contentions do not necessarily either reflect or contradict Peter Brooks’ continuing enthusiasm about the form. Brooks, in the 1995 preface to his classic *The Melodramatic Imagination*, draws attention to melodrama’s cultural portability. Brooks writes,

Perhaps melodrama alone is adequate to contemporary psychic affect. It has the flexibility, the multifariousness, to dramatize and to explicate life in imaginative forms that transgress the traditional generic constraints, and the traditional demarcations of high culture from popular entertainment. The study of melodrama has come to be an engagement with an inescapable and central form of our cultural lives.²²

A recent study furthers these possibilities to consider melodrama’s capacity to reflect not just Western cultural evolution but the *nation state*’s coming into provenance itself, while also being an imprint of modernity at large. As Carla Marcantonio writes,²³

At the turn of the nineteenth century, melodrama arose as a means to represent and help make sense of emerging democratic and industrial societies. Ever since, melodrama has retained an elastic ability to adapt to varying incarnations of modernity, becoming a form that can engage with and process cultural, social, technological, and political change.

So, both as a form, and as a cultural apparatus, melodrama is deemed as a portable, protean and protrusive form and practice, its rather unfortunate import in most scholarly literature as a ‘lowly’, *a*-modern, cinematic style notwithstanding. This throws open the possibility of endless mutations in the melodramatic form and gains further traction if one would want to look closely at how melodrama, among other imports, came to the colonies from the western imperial powers and travelled along with other major bequests of modernity from the west to its distant geographies, including South Asia.

In Europe, the end of empires and the two wars along with an assorted dialectic of mobility and movement opened up new possibilities of cinema. Melodrama also found a new poetics especially with the rise of the modern industrial city, whose politics and semiotics of mass movement of goods, capital and people the melodrama would soon embody. The emergence of a new set of cities of power (the *metropole*) in the early to mid-twentieth century should hence naturally reflect the capacity of melodrama to accommodate the quagmire of the post-War years. Undeniably hence, both Hollywood and in South Asia, melodrama reached its maturity and commercial triumph in the post-War years and in either case, we see that cinema cultures coagulate around the fortunes and prospects of a city (Los Angeles, Bombay, Calcutta, Rome, Moscow) as much as the city itself becomes a visualized object that reinforces its power of cinematic attraction. Post-War melodrama hence cannot be alienated from the general global push towards increased urbanization of life and arts. This hence begs the question: Is melodrama then the appropriate cinematic form for the disordered *cinematic city* of the post-war years, each feeding into the other’s *uncontainability* and thereby rendering to realism the *impossibility* of containment of the modern metropolis?

In India, the coming-of-age melodrama is not simply a matter of cultural transportation but a unique and subliminal subcontinental imperative that was forced open by Partition. The Partition and the newly independent Indian state, I would want to argue, opened new possibilities of dealing with space and here is where the new melodramas of the 1950s made substantial gains in terms of cinematic language and effect. The deterrents to any easy transportation of the melodrama form in India were many. Ravi Vasudevan contends that due to the import of largely one kind of melodrama in the studio-produced talkie-socials of 1930s and 1940s, the term had a necessarily lower import, especially among an emergent new middle class, who considered cinema as radical intervention in art, a school of thinking that

led to the film society movements across India in the 1940s. ‘Central here’, Vasudevan writes, ‘is the persistence of a melodramatic engagement which has often, if not always, been invested with ambiguities, nostalgic tendencies, and “backwardness” in response to the *ideologies*, if not the *experience*, of modernity’.²⁴

This is particularly significant to understand the *desire* for and popularity of melodrama in an economic and cultural *situation* that is unique to post-Partition Bengal. Unless the acute and unique crisis that befell Bengal after Partition is understood, it would be difficult to estimate what Bengali popular cinema was trying to represent in the decades immediately after it. The claim of a special, indeed unique, sub-nationality that Bengal had sought for itself and had, most productively, secured through its cinema is not new. Neither is the idea that it continued to hold on to its esteemed regionality and *bhadrolok* sensibility through much of the 1950s and 1960s. In 1969, the eminent film critic Chidananda Dasgupta, in an essay²⁵ that takes to task Hindi cinema’s proclivity towards cheap and populist thrills, claims a different space for regional cinema. Dasgupta writes, ‘The regional film, as we shall see, has its roots, its sense of identity; it tends to underplay the common factors arising in the country and stresses elements of regional tradition with some pride and nostalgia’. Dasgupta did identify the existence of a separate cultural sphere of Bengali art cinema but could not trace it to its origins, which was the idea of the nation itself. In recent film scholarship, this need has been addressed and that too *outside* the binaries of the somewhat simplistic Hindi–regional duality. Among several, two recent histories of Bengali cinema, by Bhaskar Sarkar²⁶ and Sharmistha Gooptu, have made this claim fluently. Sarkar, for example, writes,

Why Bengal? ... Because Bengal’s unique position in the evolution of modern Indian nationalism created strong regional aspirations ... and because the events of the late 1940s ushered drastic changes that transformed the national film market, ending the primacy of the Calcutta industry. Once a vibrant pronational formation, Bengal after 1947 – in the west, as in the east – was reduced to its own spectral shadow.

Like Sarkar, Gooptu²⁷ writes that the idea of an explicitly Bengali identity emerged most strongly at the very moment when the idea of Bengal as an historical agent of nationalist aspiration (that was cinematically secured till 1940s most markedly through the productions of New Theatres studio) was in rapid and unambiguous decline. She writes,

... the Bengali film, though losing out in the all-India market, actually became more identifiable in terms of a very vibrant domain of “Bengali culture”. By the end of this [1940s] period, the Bengali cinema had replaced its national aspiration of the New Theatres era with a vision of a “Bengali-nation”. This imaginary of a “Bengali-nation” sustained the Bengali cinema in its years to come.

In this formulation, the nation emerges as a problematic category in Bengali cinema since the early 1950s and this is when, I would like to claim, that the *metropole* emerged as the strongest substitute to spatially interrogate the *new citizen* of a new republic, something that popular cinema shows a strong affinity for. I will get occasion to return to this claim when I discuss the films in some detail. For now, we must remain with the idea of a new cinema emerging, across artistic and aesthetic genres, which is trying to make sense of the radical, kaleidoscopic and comprehensive changes that marked Bengali life and cinema after the Partition.

If one considers the realist/art-house mapping of the city through landmark specimens of metropolite cinema, for instance *Chinnamul* and *Nagarik*, one is willing to consider this period as a cinematic episteme, a time to assemble together the possibilities of Calcutta’s *cinematicity*. But how about reserving the same attention for melodrama? In partitioned, truncated Bengal, the crisis of the *national* was folded into the crisis of the locational, the spatial, the linguistic and the cultural. Hence *Partition* provided the *situation* that was suited to melodrama of the everyday, a crisis that was more than mere replay of the possible and the real. It was a crisis of comprehension, of utterance. In short, it was crisis of *impossibility*. The cinema of the period *had* to find means of expression that would not foreclose this crisis. The next section shows how the popular

melodrama of Uttam Kumar provided a series of complex registers for the crisis and in the process first empowered and then endangered any simplistic undertaking of the melodrama form.

Starry heights

Uttam Kumar was a star in the textbook sense, commanding and steering an entire popular industry, and dominating its entire commercial and cultural asset for close to three decades.²⁸ Kumar's popular heft is unmatched either before or after him, a heft ignored in institutionalized film studies in India. Only now, three-and-half decades after his untimely death in 1980 at the age of 54, is Kumar's body of work coming under increasing critical attention. Kumar's cinema is being noted for its pervasive and impenitent modernity, especially as it emerges in contrast to the politics of stardom either in Tamil and Telugu cinema in the southern regions²⁹ or that of Bombay cinema.³⁰

What is now, from the vantage of retrospect unambiguously apparent is that Kumar's talismanic, iconic urbanity stood vanguard to the popular modern of postcolonial Bengali cinema from its early years till well into the 1970s. As a register of no less a modernist ethic than the intellectual cinema that ran a parallel course (and which Kumar met briefly but meaningfully in only two of Rays films— *Nayak* (The Hero, 1966) and *Chiriyakhana* (The Zoo, 1967)), Kumar's films need to be discursively debated and culturally interrogated, perhaps more urgently than ever before. Suffice to say, between the early days of Kumar's stardom and his later, conscious move away from it, there are several films that make a sincere investment into creating new meaning around the city of Calcutta as a metonymic-cultural-habitational heterotopia.

Among his well-known films, besides the two with Ray, *Agnipariksha* remains a much commented upon film,³¹ it being the point of origin of a stardom that was to define Bengali popular cinema for the next two decades and more. Another film that has rightly attracted attention is the marquee melodrama *Harano Sur*³² (The Lost Tune, 1957) which was adapted from the Hollywood hit *Random Harvest*. But there are many more which demand closer interrogation. In the first half of his three-decade career itself *Sare Chuattor* (74 & ½, 1952), *Sadanander Mela* (The Lot of Sadananda, 1954), *Ora Thake Odhare* (They Live That Side, 1953), *Shapmochon* (Breaking the Curse, 1955), *Surjotoron* (The Sun Tower, 1958), *Haat Baralei Bondhu* (A Friend in Need, 1959), *Shohorer Itikatha* (Tales of the City, 1960), *Soptopodi* (The Seven Steps, 1961), *Bipasha* (Bipasha, 1962), *Deya Neya* (Quid pro Quo, 1963), *Jotugriha* (The House of Wax, 1964), *Kal Tumi Aleya* (An Illusion called Time, 1965) and *Chowringhee* (1968) are claimants to be critical samples from a robust repertoire of metropolitan melodrama. It would be instructive to closely examine some of these films.

To understand Kumar's talismanic importance in the popular cinema of Bengal, one must study Uttam Kumar's cinema as *star-texts*, not only because they are, in popular reception, identified as *his* repertoire, but because their continuing relevance and critical mobilization are possible because of seeing them as integral to the way he had shaped the discourse around his stardom and was in turn shaped by it. Christine Gledhill,³³ for example, in her introduction to the now classic collection *Stardom* provided a succinct definition of what it was to be a star. She writes,

The star challenges analysis in the way it crosses disciplinary boundaries: a product of mass culture, but retaining theatrical concerns with acting, performance and art; an industrial marketing device, but a signifying element in films; a social sign, carrying cultural meanings and ideological values, which expresses the intimacies of individual personality, inviting desire and identification; an emblem of national celebrity, founded on the body, fashion and personal style; a product of capitalism and the ideology of individualism, yet a site of contest by marginalised groups; a figure consumed for his or her personal life, who competes for allegiance with statesmen and politicians.

This formulation is a useful starting point to consider the autonomy of the 'star-text' and how its *interdisciplinarity* overwrites any easy reductions that one might attempt to draw from genre

studies or studies of cinema both as an industry and/or a culturally codified body of signs. Moreover, the aforementioned definition seems to be entirely befitting for a performer and star like Uttam Kumar, whose continuing cultural appeal did not only dominate cinema during his time but seems to have created a template of cultural memory against which all popular undertakings in cinema were measured in his long afterlife. Uttam Kumar's body of work transcended generic divisions, subverted melodramatic set-pieces and upended commercial deployment of star imagery. He could perfectly embody O. E. Klapp's figurations of the romantic hero, the *Good Joe*, the *Pin-Up* and the even the unrelenting rebel. At the same time, he played the insidious anti-hero, the humble manservant, the probing psychologist, the clever detective, the decadent aristocrat, the murderer, the player, the humbug and the idiot. Above all, and what remains a climactic achievement, he played in Ray's *Nayak*, himself. But across the many performative and cultural fields, Kumar was *also* a cultish, identifiable, omnipresent *star* who spawned an astonishing range of cinematic styles, narratives and practices.

The 1950s films discussed here either predate Kumar's stardom or are prominent films during their time though have not been noted to have any observable effect on accentuating his box office standing. In other words, the 1950s films here are aligned to Kumar's stardom but are not necessarily a party to it. The films of the 1960s, which abetted and cemented his stardom, on the other hand underline a maturing performer who is not only moving away from the staple of 'romantic melodrama' that defined his star appeal but was now aligning himself to a series of critiques of that same melodrama mode. In all the films mentioned earlier, however, the city is a central— in fact foundational— figure.

A film like *Sare Chatter* endorses — early in the 1950s— the possibility of simulating the multiple claimants to the city through the structural dismemberment of a mess-*bari* — a working men's mess — many of which crowded Calcutta's teeming central districts since the first decades of the twentieth century. This Nirmal Dey film is without much of a narrative plot and is based on a series of connected incidents, mostly hilarious, that are animated when an elderly couple, with their only daughter, comes to stay in a working men's mess. The members of the family, we learn, have been dislodged abruptly from their residence and they take shelter in the mess's *extra room*, when the manager, a distant relative of the family, kindly arranges for their temporary tenancy. The occupants of the mess-*bari*— adult men of varying ages— are initially stunned by the possibility of a young woman (played by Suchitra Sen) moving in and out of what is a deeply gendered and masculinized *spatial and moral architecture* of the mess. They are reluctant to share space with this *new* woman, who is unencumbered by her proximity to strangers. At the same time, the men are not unkind and they well understand the difficulty this family might be facing in the *partitioned* city, where homes came at a premium. The men, while officially disinclined towards the family's extended stay in the mess are also, naturally, vying for the attention of the young woman. Much of the mirth of the film is triggered by these situations, especially because the woman, independent and educated, is neither bothered nor intimidated by the attention of the men. One resident, played by Kumar, a hot-headed dashing bachelor shows particular reluctance to accommodate the guests, worried that the carefully engendered space of the mess was likely to be subverted by the young woman's alluring presence. In keeping with the generic requirements of melodrama, he is the one who falls in love with the woman and his feelings do not remain unreciprocated. Closure is found in marriage of the two but also in the initiation of a more relaxed climate of acceptance in the mess. Couched in comic denouement, the film manages to find a language that is unmistakably modern in its expression of intent. The occupants come home to the fact that restricted spaces, held tightly together by predominance of gender and class, are an increasing impossibility in a city that is now awash with newly unhoused thousands who are usurping older rights and privileges with an urgency that only an informed, gendered modernity can set free.

Sare Chuattor was a commercial success but the pairing of Kumar and Sen was yet to become standardized as a crucible for romantic melodrama. The film was particularly a redeemer for Kumar, who had not found much of a commercial success since his debut 5 years ago and his chances of finding employment as a leading actor was considerably under peril.

The next year, which saw, among others *Agnipariksha*, was a year that altered Bengali cinema forever. But in terms of locating a particular spatiality of the city, the standout film of the year was *Sadanander Mela* (The Lot of Sadananda, 1954) which was made by the same director and crew of *Ora Thake Odhare* and was adapted from Roy Del Ruth's 1947 Christmas hit *It Happened on Fifth Avenue*. Sadananda, a bohemian violinist of uncompromising ethical bent, is rendered homeless when his dilapidated house is further ruined by a night of storm and is picketed by the authorities as a public nuisance. He befriends a kitten and through it a group of homeless people (led by Kumar's character) looking for respectable accommodation. Pegged by Sadananda, the group reluctantly takes up refuge in an empty mansion that belongs to a millionaire industrialist. Deeply mindful of entering the house *only* through the rear entrance and as a matter of principle, to not usurp the arrangements of the house within, Sadananda's gang represents a group of ethical refugees, who are both illegal tenants and at the same time dignified occupiers of someone else's excess space. A widowed mother, her youthful son, a much younger daughter and her kitten settle in the mansion, with assurance from Sadananda that theirs is a rightful occupation, even if a temporary one. The curious occupancy – both moral and actual – is heightened by the entry of the daughter (Sen again) of the industrialist who, having announced her own rebellion from her pecuniary father, comes to stay with the refugees, each ignorant of the other's purpose of transgression. Initially jolted, she soon realizes the actual intent of the occupiers and begins to wilfully cohabit, without revealing her true identity. The wealthy owner, pleaded by his daughter, undertakes a similar assignment – to stay as a refugee in his own home. Here he is also united with his wife, who like his daughter, had left him for his obsession with making money. The finer nuances of a romantic melodrama (between the son of the settler and the daughter of the moneyed man) are paid adequate service before the whole plot of both set of occupiers is revealed. But, instead of the refugees being turned homeless again, closure is found in a spirit of romantic pairing, togetherness and meaningful coexistence, though Sadananda unchains himself from any certainty of home and heads for the roads again. *Sadanander Mela* eschews any obvious melancholic trail and does not sentimentalize homelessness. It is instead a smartly scripted urban fantasy which questions not just the class basis of spatial realignment but also proposes a radical, if utopian, denouement of spatial commons that is possible only through the formal deployment of *melodrama*. The entering of the house from the *rear* and the ability to adjust to a new space without usurping it through violence stand as a metaphor for desired realignments of divided spaces and hint at the possibility of acceptance, cohabitation and respectable dwelling. The film's plea for a light-hearted closure to what is essentially a class *conflict* attains another degree of subversion when placed in the context of Partition, the politics and poetics of dispossession and the enormous anxiety around legal residency in early 1950s Calcutta.

Both *Sadanander Mela* and *Ora Thake Odhare*, which came early in Uttam Kumar's career and just about preceded his imminent box office breakthrough, seem to have laid the foundations for his enormous future appeal. But more importantly they had established Uttam Kumar's ability to play the Good Joe and the everyman, the one who could as easily mingle in the crowd as he could also stand out. He was unfavourably compared to the generation of studio-enabled stars like Promothesh Barua and Durgadas Bandopadhyay, to whose privileged and pedigreed background, Kumar's own, despondently middle class one as it was, would fade incomparably. But the changed circumstances of Bengal's chequered years doubtlessly found in the indistinguishable young man the possible successor to the hoary heroes of yesteryears, a young man in whose ordinariness one could trace the hapless new citizen, the displaced refugee, the troubling aspirations of a young artiste and the youthful lover hopelessly in love. This is the initial capital of Uttam Kumar's fledgling stardom and he built unflinchingly upon its wide appeal in the early 1950s. But soon he

started playing roles with a more distinguished sense of belonging, characters with firm if polite conviction and those where he could push the boundaries of social and moral one-upmanship.

A wonderful example of this evolution is *Surjotoron* from the ensemble direction team *Agradoot* (The Sun Tower, 1958), which was a loose adaptation of King Vidor's 1949 film of Ayn Rand's *Fountainhead*. Legal residency is also a theme in *Surjotoron* which came at the heels of *Harano Sur* and did not hesitate to parade the star appeal of Uttam Kumar and his sure-fire romantic pairing with Suchitra Sen through a slew of populist staples. But the film's deployment of architecture to announce its real investment in the actual, physical life of the metropolis is an unusual if potent metaphor for the city itself, which was in need of a radical makeover for making place for the newly displaced. Like the Hollywood hit, the film is set in a roller-coaster world of rival architecture firms battling over the future course that *new* architecture is going to take and is dominated primarily by the arrogant, egotistic, uncompromising figure of Somnath Mukherjee, a champion of architectural design that eschews convention and extramural grandeur to create new, utilitarian designs for the future. The Bengali film follows the twists and turns of Mukherjee's (played by Kumar) life as he engages with the contested planning and construction of 'Suntower', the Wynand Building of the novel. The Suntower was to incorporate the latest in architectural engineering and was to house the poor. At the same time, it was an initiative of community building built with middle-class expertise and private capital and which was to literally and figuratively receive 'the first rays of the Sun when it falls on the city'. On one hand, the film borrows the ethic of individual accomplishment, so heavily proposed in Rand and so pertinent for post-WWII Hollywood, into a socialist campaign for better living in a postcolonial city which is full of homeless claimants and poor dwellers from slums that dot the city's nether regions. On the other hand, the film poses a definitive, locational dialogue between the emerging middle and elite classes and how that dialogue could be accommodated through new architectural initiatives and a new engineering of the city's habitational zones. In this film, the entire initiative to create new spaces rests with middle class, a class that considered itself the most affected by the great tornado of Partition. The film foregrounds an unapologetic vanguardism of the middle and rentier classes, the former investing the requisite intellectual input as the beneficiary of the sympathetic capitalist to create community housing for the homeless. The chief players in the housing game are middle class and the rich and abrasive or share the romantic rags-to-riches story that is such a valuable asset for the melodrama form. What is interesting is that the film consciously moves away from nationalist rhetoric that dominated much of the postcolonial political and social ideas about statist reconstruction of Indian life and practices. By doing so, the film manages to animate a new agency for the educated and strong willed middle classes who dream of remaking the city. While in itself it is not terribly rare to find illustrations of private capital extending to colossal enterprises of community housing, the film does belong equally to Rand's uber individualism and spirit of human enterprise while also managing to voice a ubiquitous leftist emancipatory rhetoric that defined much of contemporary Bengali cultural practices. It is a film that uses the appeal of the star but in the heydays of the romantic melodrama, manages to sidestep the overtly social concerns of individual romance for a more tangible concern of the public claim to space, even if within the strictly defined boundaries of middle-class aspiration.

It would be worthwhile to ask if a naturalist framework would permit a *Sare Chuattor*, *Surjotoron* or a *Sadanander Mela* because the premise they foreground have enough possibilities of mutation unless one tiptoes into the expandable narrative framework of melodrama. The films, had they followed the realist pattern, would be unable to reach the desired climax: building the huge apartment blocks, romantic pairing in a men's mess or and the circuitous usurping of legal claims to unused households. Herein, the so-called generic *weakness* of melodrama was to become its biggest strength. Clearly, the films are less about finding a realist closure to the acute crisis of homelessness. That would be reproducing a *Nagarik* and *Chinnamul* all over again. Instead, the films want to foreground a possible realignment of city-space through an imaginative reconstruction of the limits of the *possible* and hence contain within themselves the desire that spills out of

the sheer *uncontainability* of the postcolonial city. I would want to argue that if uncontainability, as a realist impetus, produces the structural dystopia of *Chinnamul* and *Nagarik*, it is the elasticity of the melodrama form that contains the desire of the realistically improbable. To that end, the success of the films in deploying what they had set out to do is not in spite of them being specimens of melodrama but precisely because of them being in the mode of melodrama. In other words, the sheer *impossibility* of the *partition* crisis in Calcutta produced the 'inexactitude' of the cinematic form; one feeds and produces the other through the ubiquitous, unmistakable, ever-dependable figure of the emerging *star* at the centre of this reconstruction.

It would be an oversight to see the 1960s necessarily as a continuation of the 1950s in major way, though it is often customary to club them together, specially through the corpus of Kumar's films and his continuing and expanding scope of stardom. The historical anxieties of the 1950s had partially abated in the early years of the 1960s while a new set of concerns emerged. The acute housing crisis, for example, and indeed the whole semantics of dispossession that was germane to the films of the 1950s had doubtlessly declined. What occupied the 1960s cinema was an interrogation of citizenry itself— the symptomatic difficulties of metropolitan management and the politics of identity that was to now come to the fore as citizens adjusted to the reordering of life and space after Partition. If the haunting of Partition and the devastating 1940s were to be felt, they would be a diffident, indeed lambent presence. It is not difficult to see in Kumar's cinema the reflection of this relative subsistence of civil and political stability. And it is hence no surprise that Kumar himself, by the late 1950s and early 1960s was showing increasing restlessness with the phlegmatic safety latches of romantic melodrama and insisting instead, on characters that would reflect the tastes of a maturing viewership. His stardom and box office draw was his biggest guarantee to surpass any formulaic allegiance to the romantic genre. If there was any time to confront the narrative and scopic confines of popular cinema, this was the period.

Kumar co-produced *Saptapadi* in 1961, his first production since *Harano Sur*. *Saptapadi*, directed by Ajoy Kar, proved to be an iconic film— way above the technical and performative virtuosity of the usual, scopically limited, romantic matinee. Set against World War II, *Saptapadi* is the story of star-crossed lovers from different and differing ethnic communities. Kumar's character Krishnendu is a medical student, who in his life's choices has embraced the bequests of modernity that stood against the deeply entrenched orthodoxy of his Hindu father. He falls in love with Rina Brown, a confident, self-assured Anglo-Indian woman studying medicine with him in Calcutta's famed Medical College. Rina Brown is played, memorably, again by Suchitra Sen in what became one of her defining roles. The film follows the pattern of them being at warring ends in the beginning, who, during a performance, notably of Shakespeare's *Othello*, fall in love. Krishnendu is asked to convert to Christianity by Rina's father, a proposition which as a non-believer, he effortlessly embraces, brushing aside Rina's expressed remorse. But Krishnendu's father coaxes Rina to give up on the relationship. Spurned, Krishnendu leaves the city and settles in a remote village as a missionary doctor. Rina, unable to cope with the loss and unable to come to terms with the exposure of her *illicit* in-betweenness (having been born not of English parents but of a wedlock between her English father and his 'lowly' Bengali housemaid) loses herself to wanton self-destruction. When they meet again, accidentally, Krishnendu is a born-again Christian physician and Rina a washed-up alcoholic nurse and the country is caught up in the War. After a series of chances and coincidences punctuated by documentary uses of war footage, Rina, battered and broken, finally finds peace with Krishnendu and they walk towards a possible conjugality. *Saptapadi* is remarkable for its editing, luminous cinematography, minimalist soundtrack, and powerful, war-saturated set-design, which subverted the customary set-pieces of the family melodrama. The first part of the movie uses Calcutta's multicultural institutions and neighbourhoods to create a testament to a protean modernity, which when challenged by orthodoxy, spills over into the lives of its two protagonists. The second part and the climax, even as a protracted romance, moves away from the familial and the Oedipal towards a humanist denouement, in

which the lovers eschew the familiar catalogue of quotidian dilemmas common in romances of the period to embrace a historical, indeed transcultural autonomy. *Saptapadi* was *Casablanca* for the Bengali audience and remains a film that still draws considerable viewership.

This film pitched the visual and cultural possibilities of the melodrama to such cinematic heights that it actually signalled a climactic moment for the romantic melodrama form. In fact, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with films like *Bicharak* (The Judge, 1959), *Khokababur Prottyabartan* (Return of the Little Master, 1960) and *Sesh Onko* (The Last Act, 1963), Uttam Kumar was strongly signalling his move away from any overwhelming image of the youthful romantic hero that he may have accrued through the 1950s. In *Bicharak*, he played an erudite and ethical judge who, when accosted by a case, is forced to sit on judgement on his own past, having abetted his first wife's death from alleged apathy. In *Sesh Onko*, Uttam Kumar's character, having fallen in love with a woman outside marriage, murders his offending wife but is unable to evade an elaborate mousetrap that puts to test his sanity and eventually forces him to confess his crime. In *Khokababur Prottyabartan*, he plays an effete and loyal manservant. These films came comparatively early in his repertoire and challenge any easy conclusion about him being primarily a protagonist of romantic, melodramatic escapades.

Kumar's moving away from this form was inevitable and symptomatic. And it was perhaps no surprise that Kumar's next film as a producer, *Jotugriha*, 1964, challenged the romantic genre upfront. Having found immense commercial success with both *Haranu Sur* and *Saptapadi*, it would have been de rigueur of Kumar to continue with the popular directors with whom he had mostly worked. But characteristically, Kumar defied expectations and headed for Tapan Sinha, who was by then known as the master of the 'middle-of-the-road' cinema. Sinha and Kumar had worked together twice before [in *Upohar* (The Gift, 1955) and *Jhinder Bandi* (The Prisoner of Jhind, 1961)] and both were keen to work again. Sinha's consummate script ensured that *Jotugriha* was not following any generic conventions of melodrama and neither was he keen to use Kumar's credential as a 'romantic' star.

Jotugriha is about doomed conjugality, the complex algebra of a marriage tiptoeing towards annulment. As the film opens we see Kumar as Shatadal Dutta, a successful, senior official of the archaeological department of the Government of India living in his upscale apartment in the heart of Calcutta's Chowringhee. Shatadal, we learn, is contemplating divorce from Madhuri, his wife, played by Arundhati Debi. Shatadal, obsessed with the country's built ancient heritage is also an architect – builder and preserver of homes, except his own. He is flanked, socially, one on side by an acrimonious couple who noisily occupy the flat next to his and on the other by Supriyo, the humble clerk under him, who is struggling to make ends meet but is plaint and happy in his family life. The film moves to the past of the couple, where they are shown to share deep bonding, socialize sparingly in their free evenings and are busy planning their future, a future shaping up, brick-by brick, in form of a two-storeyed house. But things start to falter once they learn the impossibility of having a child together. Initially they accept and agree to bear it out but soon the walls come crumbling down when they are unable to work anymore on the emptiness of their conjugality, which unattended, veers towards inevitable estrangement. The narrative unravels within the enclosed framework of a matured and quiet conjugality and the archetypes of such plots – the inevitable 'other' woman, alcoholism, social castration, difficult in-laws, protuberant patriarchy or complaint gender-playing – are shut out. The acrimonious couple continue to live together with an overt sense of helpless doom, the ever-humble Supriyo finds happiness in his sparse subsistence, but Shatadal and Madhuri move on – quietly, without acrimony, abandoning their future apartment mid-way. Years later they meet, accidentally, in a first-class waiting room in a railway station where their respective trains are supposed to criss-cross. After initial hesitation, they find comfort and spend some time together. Both realize that they are still single. Both have visibly aged in the years between, and they hover a yearning to go back to each other. But they resist the temptation, knowing well that their marriage had no external instrument of damage

but had emptied itself on its own. They take their trains to their respective destinations, perhaps never to meet again.

Between *Bicharak* and *Jotugriha*, Uttam Kumar ruptured the romantic melodrama from within. Clearly, the hurly-burly of romantic melodrama, the ups and downs, the star-crossed lovers meeting at the other end of a world conspiring against their coming together or the excesses of fear, loathing or overwrought familial sentimentality are undone in each film. These films are conscious of Kumar's immense star appeal but never coax the script towards it. In *Jotugriha*, Shatadal is as helpless and forceful, churlish and charitable, embittered and resilient as one should be in a realistic portrayal of a failed marriage, just like Madhuri is. Their marriage unravels in the foreground of a slick city life of parties and business deals, of nightclubs and live jazz music, in the midst of neons and high-street apartments where each in their own way are coming to terms with their own inadequacies. *Jotugriha* remains a remarkably sensitive and progressive testament of big-city ennui, social transformation and gendered modernity. Ray's *Mahanagar* called for the *new* role of women in a city charged with the flux and indeterminacy of modernity. Coming a year after, *Jotugriha* furthers the force of this change way beyond just the role of the *new* working woman and towards a whole new social and conjugal realignment.

That the realignment is historic, incontrovertible and inevitable was signalled most vividly in the last film that this article will examine closely— *Chowringhee*. Between *Jotugriha* and *Chowringhee*, Kumar, again breaking away from conventions, appeared in two Ray movies, *Nayak* and *Chiriakhana*, in the latter playing the fictional Bengali sleuth Byomkesh Bakshi. *Nayak*, as is well known, was Ray's deliberate *analysis*, often verging on the psychoanalytical, of Uttam Kumar's fame and stardom. *Nayak* carries all the markers of Ray's brilliant cinematic sense but what is less explicit is Kumar's astonishing confidence in his own stardom, which even when under the weight of Ray's intense interrogation, emerges triumphant. It would not be precocious to conclude that Kumar's stardom was now, having secured the rite of passage through Ray, ensconced in history.

Hence *Chowringhee*, in which Kumar plays, perhaps for the first time, a *spectator*, a character who sidesteps for the drama to unfold, is not an anomaly. Set in and outside a lavish luxury hotel in the heart of Calcutta, *Chowringhee* is an episodic film woven around a set of characters who animate the hotel's crepuscular coalition – the tuxedoed managers and vigilant staff, misfit musicians, itinerant guests, hawk-eyed lobbyists, unctuous businessmen, gossipers and hangers-on, secretive nightwalkers, inquisitive oddballs, wide-eyed foreigners. In other words, the hotel is the city itself and the city, a hotel. The various people that walk in and out, who work there and who form a chain of interdependent relations of both power and passion are *observed* by the narrator and receptionist Shankar, through the eyes of his colleague Syata Bose, a role that Kumar authors. Through a series of closely observed sketches, the innards and insecurities of chiaroscuric city life are revealed, coupled with Syata's wry and wistful annotations.

Chowringhee is essentially a story of departures. A kind-hearted escort to an opportunist businessman, having fallen in love with one of her hosts, is blackmailed to commit suicide, the genteel manager Marco Polo, mourning his wife's elopement, leaves for Africa, the Brahms-addicted cultured musician is asked to leave, Shankar loses his job and the hotel itself changes hands to new, unscrupulous, upstart money. Syata, the weathercock of the hotel and the city, leaves too and is struck by wretched tragedy. *Chowringhee* symptomizes the end of a period in Calcutta's history when the last vestiges of the colonial city are noticeably in retreat, grace and civility is slowly making way for rampant vulgarism, haggardly deportment and entrenched transactionalism.

Chowringhee also marks a departure in UttamKumar's incredible stardom saga. Kumar was 42 and increasingly restless to play roles that suited his age. A number of factors— financial, social and cultural and even political— intrinsic to his stardom and to the city's history but extraneous to this essay also contributed to his gradual move away from his earlier predominance, though he remained, commercially, the top-draw for at least another decade.

Conclusion

As far as Kumar's body of work is concerned, which spanned three decades and over 200 films, there is always some danger in identifying an overwhelming impetus. Not all Kumar's films were either popular, or metropolitan in their scopical intent or urbane and sophisticated. But it would not be reductive to see the city as central to a large number of his films and not inexplicably. Along with the films discussed earlier, there are others like *Sagarika* (1956), *Shilpi* (1956), *Prithibi Amare Chai* (1957), *Indrani* (1958), *Chawa Pawa* (1959), *Thana Theke Aschi* (1965), *Sudhu Ekti Bochor* (1966), which were all with Kumar as lead and of the melodrama genre, though for many of them, like *Thana Theke Aschi*, 'classical' melodrama is a grossly inadequate formulation. But one trajectory of Kumar's body of work between the early 1950s and late 1960s does hint at a pattern: it was through his accentuating stardom in the 1950s that the melodrama form, with its signature designs, most readily coalesced into a dependable commercial apparatus. And it was through the same star *figure* that the form is slowly pressed from within, to enforce its gradual but inevitable dismemberment. Also, it was in the *star text* itself that a gradually transmuting modern melodrama met its postcolonial metropolitan *situatedness* under the overarching mark of a historically irreversible event, without which the possibilities of the form would have remained unexplored. The year 1968, the year of *Chowringhee*, did actually signify another historical *episteme* in the city's life. After the relative calm of 1950s and 1960s, Calcutta was thrust into abject street violence, visceral political unrest and militant trade-unionism. It is hence a moment of rupture— in the *metropole*, in the *cinematic city* and in the narrative of Kumar's stardom. There are a number of films in the 1970s with Uttam Kumar in which the city continues to draw significant attention. *Ekhane Pinjor* (1971), *Nagar Darpone* (1975), *Jodubangsho* (1974), *Ami, She o Shokha* (1975) are brilliant testimonials to an ageing actor's deliberate and visible efforts to choose 'un'-heroic and grey and grotty roles over safe, romantic or virtuous ones. But they were *beyond* his stardom and not dependent on it anymore. On the other hand, Calcutta itself emerged in the parallel art cinema as a *key text* itself, finding brilliant chroniclers, as mentioned, in Ray, Sen and Sinha. But the Calcutta of Kumar, that made his cinema's unique mode of *spatializing* Calcutta possible— with the *situatedness* of its liminality, its postcolonial immediacy, its cosmopolitan confederacy — was perhaps gone forever.

Notes

1. For a more detailed discussion on studio cinema in Bengal, see Gooptu, *Bengali Cinema*; Dass, *Outside the Lettered City*; and Mukherjee (ed), *Aural Films, Oral Cultures*.
2. See Sarkar and Bandopadhyay (eds), *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades*, an anthology of essays that provides a micro-history of the 1940s and how it impacted Calcutta.
3. Having originated from Henry Lefebvre's use of the term in reference to social production of space, the term now finds mention in scientific, architectural and social science literature, the last being heavily dependent on the evolution of the term and its implications in reference to the comparatively late work of Michele Foucault. Most appropriately, the term *spatialize* would indicate the production or appropriation of new spatial configurations that are largely configured by particular time or event or both. My use of the word refers specifically to the way the city of Calcutta was being reimagined in cultural representation and memory, specifically in relation to and as a symptom of Partition, which as an event and as a register of a specific temporality, was forcing new ways to rethink the constitution of urban space.
4. The term used here is primarily in reference to Soja's use of the term 'metropolarity' to hint at the political economy of the fractal, dispersed, postmodern city. See Soja, 'Six Discourse on the Postmetropolis'. However, I would want to explore the term *metropole* also in the way that it has since found mention in the literature of globalization— as a centripetal economic and cultural ground zero of power that defines and controls the relationship with the margins. In case of Calcutta, the term might have a particularly interesting import since Calcutta was in actuality *the* metropole of Indian colonial modernity, which lost much of its entrenched importance in the emerging political economy of the newly independent Indian nation state and yet continued to mobilize substantial cultural and visual capital. Calcutta hence embodies the *duality* of being both a colonial *metropole* and *just another* postcolonial Indian metropolis. This marks a difficulty of passage that has imprinted itself since the beginning of the postcolonial period. Along with Calcutta, one can immediately think of, say, Alexandria and St Petersburg as having similar trajectories. There is little scope to go into this argument here but it presents a complex pattern, a troubling rite of passage to postcoloniality of an erstwhile colonial commercial and cosmopolitan behemoth.

5. The reference to the Kantian 'sublime' is apparent while the use is that of irony, hinting at the fearful attraction the city generates among its authors, pamphleteers, artistes and canvassers.
6. There is significant body of scholarship now available on this subject. Among classics, see Bradbury and McFarlane (eds), *Modernism 1890–1930*; Berman, *All That Is Solid*. Among newer scholarship, see Harding, *Writing the City*; and Thacker, *Modernism, Space and the City*.
7. See Biswas, "The city and the real."
8. See Bhattacharya, "Nagarik."
9. For a brilliant discussion on Ray's trilogy, see Chaudhuri, "In the city." Also see, Ghosal, "Strikethrough Calcutta."
10. *Apanjan* (The Kins, 1968), *Ekhoni* (The Present, 1969) and *Harmonium* (Harmonium, 1976).
11. *Pratidwandi* (The Adversary, 1970), *Seemabadda* (The Company Limited, 1971) and *Jana Aranya* (The Middleman, 1975).
12. *Interview* (Interview, 1971), *Calcutta '71* (Calcutta '71, 1971) and *Padatik* (The Guerilla Fighter, 1973).
13. See Ghosh's "Urban baggage"; and Bose's "Modernity, globality, sexuality" to understand the relationship between the city, domesticity and sexuality in Ray's *Mahanagar* and *Charulata* (The Lonely Housewife, 1964).
14. Here one has in mind films like Ritwik Ghatak's *Bari Theke Paliye* (The Runaway Boy, 1958), Mrinal Sen's *Neel Akasher Niche* (Under the Blue Sky, 1959), Ray's *Mahanagar* (The Big City, 1963).
15. Here I draw from the works of Jeremy Butler, Richard Dyer and Christine Gledhill, all of them pointing towards *stardom* as a combination of obvious and cavernous factors, which when they come together, tend to subvert any easy reduction of popular cinema to any threadbare ideological, artistic or commercial apparatus. That would be the best way to define the *star-text*. The concept and its relevance for this article are discussed further in the section on "Starry heights".
16. See Chowdhury, "The Indian Partition."
17. Indian People's Theatre Association, a Leftist association of playwrights, actors, musicians who responded to the need for political awakening through cultural activism in the difficult years of 1940s and remained extremely influential in Indian public life and cinema for at least the next two decades. See Jalil, *Liking Progress, Loving Change* for a history of the movement.
18. See Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 6.
19. Elsaesser, "Tales of sound and fury," 164.
20. See Shepherd, "Melodrama as avant-garde."
21. See Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 7.
22. Brooks, "The Melodramatic Imagination".
23. See Marcantonio, *Global Melodrama*, 2.
24. See Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public*, 31.
25. Das Gupta, "Indian cinema today," 31.
26. Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation*, 125.
27. Gooptu, *Bengali Cinema*, 21.
28. For a more detailed evaluation of Kumar's life and cinema, see Chowdhury, "The heroic laughter."
29. Prasad, *Cine-Politics*; and Pandian, *The Image Trap* are two of the best scholarly works available to understand the cultural, linguistic and public discourse around the making of stardom in the Indian south.
30. Among a number of recent studies of Bombay cinema of the 1950s, specially of how stardom and city collate and collapse, see Prasad (ed), *Ideology of Hindi Film*; Viridi, *The Cinematic Imagination*; Majumdar, *Bombay Cinema*; and Wani, *Fantasy of Modernity*.
31. Nag, "Love in the Time of Nationalism"; Gooptu, *Bengali Cinema*, specially chapter 4; and Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation*, specially chapter 3.
32. See Biswas, "The Couple and Their Spaces"; and Chattopadhyay, "Art Deco Residences."
33. Gledhill, *Stardom*, XI; Also see Dyer, *Stars*; and Butler (ed), *Star Texts*.

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