

## Literary Aesthetics and the Discourse of 'Good Taste' in Post Liberalization Bengali 'Parallel' Cinema

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### Abstract

The post-liberalization film culture in West Bengal experienced a group of filmmakers who generated a sense of nostalgia for a lost tradition of a glorious past of Bengali literary cinema of the previous decades valued by the suave, middleclass, Bengali intelligentsia. Amidst the overall monopoly of contemporary popular cinema some films like *Unishe April* (Rituparno Ghosh, 1996), *Asukh* (Rituparno Ghosh, 1999), *Paromitar Ekdin* (Aparna Sen, 2000) *Ek Je Achhe Kanya* (Subrata Sen, 2001), *Shanjhatir Roopkathara* (Anjan Das, 2002 ) etc that emerged in the mid 90s constructed the paradigm of the post 1990s Bengali literary film culture, not only in terms of their use of particular style elements or narrative devices or their cinematic appeal but also their imagination of a 'class' of audience. The discourse of literary-ness became a primary concern of this post-1990s Bengali film practice and literary-ness of Bengali cinema has been seen as a marker of 'good taste' amongst a section of Bengali intelligentsia. The discourse of literary-ness got reflected not only in the film form, but also in the production-distribution system, the strategies of exhibition, and the media discourses generated around these films. This film culture which aims to bring out Bengali cinema from the commercialized model of the mainstream circuit was often referred as the 'parallel' cinema. This paper is an attempt to read how literary aesthetics functions as the politics and poetics of this 'parallel' film culture and aims to address the question of 'taste' associated with this film practice mapping it on broader terrain of Bengal's film history.

**Keywords:** Good taste; *bhadralok*; literary-ness; intelligentsia; parallel; Bengali cinema

In the 1980s and the early 1990s Bengali cinema was experiencing a strange amalgam of kitschy box-office hits and critically acclaimed works of New Wave cinema. The leading players in the second kind of cinema were Goutam Ghose, Aparna Sen and Buddhadeb Dasgupta. While Ghose and Dasgupta were experimenting with the existence of humanity beyond the mundane middleclass life-world Aparna Sen was focusing on the middleclass home, and the crisis of the interior domain. But such exercises were being appreciated only by the niche audience base of the film festival circuit and among film societies. The formula films of the revenging action heroes and mythical narrative entertained the masses.

Amidst these some films like *Unishe April* (Rituparno Ghosh, 1996), *Asukh* (Rituparno Ghosh, 1999), *Paromitar Ekdin* (Aparna Sen, 2000) *Ek Je Achhe Kanya* (Subrata Sen, 2001), *Shanjhatir Roopkathara* (Anjan Das, 2002 ) etc that emerged in the mid 90s constructed the paradigm of the post 1990s Bengali literary film culture, not only in terms of their use of particular style elements or narrative devices or their cinematic appeal but also their imagination of an audience, their marketing structure, their production patterns and the logic of their publicity. Popular press columns appreciated these films (by filmmakers like Rituparno Ghosh, Anjan Das and others) for regenerating a 'lost' pleasure and reclaiming the

lost (*bhadralok*) audience of Bengali cinema. This paper is an attempt to read the politics and poetics of this literary film practice mapping it on broader terrain of Bengal's film history.

Before addressing the question of politics of this literary film practice I have to, very briefly mention the cultural dominance of a particular (*bhadralok*) class in Bengali cultural rhetoric and its relation to Bengali cinema in order to trace literary cinema's appeal and its policies. "Bhadralok" literally meaning 'gentle folk' in Bengali language is a term widely used in Bengal to refer to the educated, though not necessarily affluent middle and upper sections of society, and is often used not only as a socio economic category but also as a cultural entity. As Historians and scholars have explored, during British colonization in India (1757- 1947) an upwardly mobile section emerged in Bengal that was physically removed from the productive activities of both agriculture and industrialization, but gained a significant position as the ruling class. Western education, a certain kind of learnedness, a world of culture and the rhetoric about culture gave a unified identity to this heterogeneous category called *bhadralok* formed of principally Hindu 'upper' caste groups. And in the late nineteenth century they came to exercise social power and cultural dominance over both urban centers like Calcutta as well as the rural areas. In the Bengali film industry however, this *bhadralok* presence gained significance in the 1930s with the remarkable success of New Theaters that continued in the later decades of the popularity of a Bengali film genre based on romance and couple space widely known as Uttam-Suchitra era. And in this period many famous authors were actively associated with Bengali filmic practice. Starting from Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay and Premankur Atarshi to Tarashankar

Bandyopadhyay and Purnendu Patri the author's presence in the Bengali cinema history was significant in this period.

In the 1980s Bengali film history experienced a juncture when a new group of filmmakers joined the industry. The mass welcome the new melodramas of Biresh Chatterjee, Prabhat Roy and Anjan Chowdhury, and the elite *bhadralok* world allegedly maintained its distance from it; the new Government invested in a healthy film culture with autonomous bodies (like West Bengal Film Development Corporation, Nandan) and some other projects and policies, and the film practice in general responded with multiple generic formations and formulae. In the 1980s a diverse range of Bengali films were released with their makers and producers coming from dissimilar backgrounds, different social positions and contradictory perspectives. But the popular press discourse run by the *bhadralok* elite instead of reading the 'difference' focused only on 'derogatory' quality of these films. And with a need for cinema of 'good taste' was created in these practices. A historical trajectory of Bengali cinema was established praising the 1950s and 60s as the 'golden' period of Bengali films. And at the same time, the 1980s is seen as a 'break' in *bhadralok* film history with the emergence and popularity of a certain kind of Bengali film that caused the 'crisis phase' of Bengali cinema in this period and the decades that followed. A cinema 'with a clean entertainment value' was longed by a section of *bhadralok* intelligentsia and interestingly in this construction of 'good taste' Bengali literature played an important role. And literary adaptations or contemporary films with a literary quality were seen as reclaiming the 'good old days' of Bengali films. .

### **The Literary-ness as a Dominant Cultural Code of Bengali Cinema**

The historian Sumit Sarkar sees the self defining term '*bhadralok*' serving as sociological shorthand and also as a broad charismatic authority for itself in the class' self-perception (1997: 169). This idea of *bhadralok* self-perception is useful to us for understanding the 'break' that we see in cinematic practice and to map the narrative of reclamation of literary cinema that we want to explore. The discourse of *bhadralok* culture and the notion of a certain kind of Bengali-ness that was a dominant feature of Bengali cinema experienced a break in *bhadralok* perception in the 1980s. Here it would be valid to ask whether this was essentially a real 'break' in the history of Bengali cinema, or if, and how much this was based on a certain perception. And more importantly, whose perception and perspective should we take as the standard perception and perspective. It seems to us that this is a question that can be debated over endlessly and we may never find any final answer. Hence, I would like to start with the question of a belief system and its dominance in structuring a cultural history. Bengali cinema in the 1950s and the 1960s and partly in the 1970s may represent and carry multiple cultural influences, but in the dominant belief system, it was a cinema of the Bengali *bhadralok* class. The popular imagery of the Uttam-Suchitra romance, and the narratives based on Bengali literature possibly had an audience also in the non *bhadralok* section of Bengal's population, but largely the pleasure it provided, the world it represented is close to the *bhadralok* world and is identified as 'our cinema' in the *bhadralok* belief system. Moreover, in the period that we take as the context for our narrative of post 1990s Bengali cinema, the 1980s' Bengali public sphere strongly identified this cinema of the previous decades as the cinema of 'our' *bhadralok* Bengali class and recognized these

decades as the 'glorious past' of Bengali cinema. Bengali films based on Bengali literature and the filmic practice that mimics the pleasure of literary narrative were seen as something which reflect good taste.

And while discussing the question of 'taste' in these films I find Pierre Bourdieu's formulation is central to my methodological approach. Especially, I deploy the concept of class, as determined in a system of self-definition and self-differentiation (Bourdieu, 1993). The idea of 'pure' taste central to 1990s-2000s Bengali 'parallel' cinema is related to the implementation of a cognitive acquirement of a 'cultural code' that also functions as a marker of a particular (*bhadralok*) class. Following Bourdieu we see this marker of class, in its 'autonomous' field of cultural production, and the discourse generated around this cultural practice as fulfilling "...a social function of legitimating" the social differentiation (1984: 7). The notion of 'good taste' constructed around this cinema is partly a construct of a particular (*bhadralok*) class and is related to their notion of 'pure taste' and 'cultured Bengaliness'. Significantly Bengali literature and literary style is seen as expression of that 'good taste' in the discourse generated around this film culture. And the cinema practiced by many filmmakers from the mainstream were as seen as lacking that 'literary' quality and hence derogatory or/and of 'bad taste'.

One of the very first writings that appeared in *Sattar Dashak / The decade of Seventies*, is an essay by Someshwar Bhoulmik called "Sattar Dashaker Bangla Chhabhi" / "The Bengali Films of the Nineteen Seventies" where he observes the deterioration of Bengali cinema in the late 1970s with films like *Amanush*, *Ananda Ashram* or *Baba Taraknath* arguing that these films were devoid of the 'clean entertainment value' that was a

characteristic of Bengali films in the 1950s and the 1960s (Bhoumik, 1981). Though it's not clearly mentioned what are the constituents of this 'clean entertainment value' it can be perceived that by this specific term that perhaps he means cinema which is closed to the model of literary narrative and film script with literary dialogue which were absent in mythological films and action films inspired by popular Bombay cinema aesthetics.

Somen Ghosh in his book *Bangla Cinemar Palabadal (The Changing Phase of Bengali Cinema)* has tried to analyze this 'crisis' ridden period of Bengali cinema when he observes that "when a totally unrealistic, lower standard film made its silver jubilee at the box office, it expressed our shameless nature in our cultural characterlessness" (Ghosh, 1990). It's interesting to note that like Ghosh, the opinions expressed in many other books and articles saw the popularity of certain kinds of films as a marker of the 'crisis' of the Bengali film industry. Ghosh later even laments the popularity of a filmmaker like Anjan Chowdhury. He writes about Chowdhury, (I have heard that) he (Anjan Chowdhury) has broken the records of many of the earlier filmmakers. He has become so famous that even other directors are keen on having their film scripts written by him. But it is difficult to digest his films for any educated Bengali with proper taste. His films are not only unreal and bizarre, but full of a kind of tasteless vulgarity. It is really a matter of research, which class of audience makes these films hits (Ghosh, 1990: 162).

Ghosh laments the loss of the 'characteristic purity' that Bengali films once had and their efficient expression of 'clean reality' that was rare in other regional films. It is not only Ghosh but also in the writings of others like Partha Raha or Rajat Roy that the 'cultural superiority'

of earlier Bengali films compared to both other regional films of that period and contemporary Bengali films is discussed. Raha for instance develops his comparison of Bengali cinema's 'now' and 'then' narrative not only in terms of the deterioration of film quality, but also with reference to the emergence of the control of Tollywood by the Bombay mafia or the underworld dons of the coal industry and that of the non Bengali film producers chain (with surnames like Kejriwal, Agarwal or Khaitan) (Raha, 2004: 80-81). Rajat Roy in his book similarly recognizing the 'declining' quality of Bengali films, studies the fragmentation of the Bengali audience (Roy, 2001). Most of these writings present a crisis story of Bengali cinema from the perspective of the "educated Bengali *bhadralok* class", who feels distanced from the 'crudity' and 'vulgarity' of the contemporary mainstream model and the target audience of this model.

Thus in my narrative, to understand the 'break' in *bhadralok* cinema I rely on the perception of the *bhadralok* belief system, and whether the same *bhadralok* hegemony that denied the emergence of a new Bengali film culture were fine to be habituated with it on TV or not is a spectatorship question that is difficult to establish, and one that does not impact the *bhadralok* nostalgia for a cinema that is lost. What I am concerned with here for my narrative is the dominant *bhadralok* belief system and their position on the new mainstream cinema. And I trace from newspaper archives and my interviews of the people who experienced that moment as film directors, producers, film society activists, journalists or simply film viewers how the dominant (*bhadralok*) belief system rejected this new phase of mainstream Bengali cinema in the 1980s. And in this very moment the various sectors engaged in the history writing of Bengali cinema posit the

contemporary in a 'crisis narrative' comparing it to the 'glorious' history of Bengali cinema. From the regular section of newspaper columns to a change in the film society approach, from making documentaries on Bengali film history to the emerging habit of watching old Bengali films on the big screen (*Nandan* screenings) or small screen, the public sphere is going through a phase of gaining a 'historical' awareness of Bengali films. With a certain kind of Bengali film becoming popular with a certain kind of people, the *bhadralok* started contrasting their films and their film culture of the past with the culture that dominates in present moment with its 'crudity' and 'vulgarity'. Imagining the present moment as the dominance of the vulgar mainstream, the *bhadralok* public sphere discourse imagined a 'parallel' of the quality films of the past and present exceptions that carry a legacy of that past. And I believe that it is this serious attempt to recognize and differentiate 'our' films from 'their' films that led to the narrative of reclaiming 'our' (*bhadralok*) literary films. Here it is also important to mention that the cultural need for a literary film culture and the 'parallel' film culture that came into being are not necessarily linked in a causal chain. Both these phenomena - the cultural need for a literary cinema and an emergent (parallel) film culture feed into each other. In this discourse of 'parallel' Bengali cinema, *bhadralok* nostalgia and a memory of the *bhadralok* cinematic past provided the perspective from which an idea of the 'parallel' came into being. Both in idea and in the practice of this 'parallel' film culture in the post liberalization moment, I see a significant departure from the earlier 'parallel' / 'art house' traditions of Bengali films. While the art cinema discourse of Ray Sen and Ghatak challenges the literary texts with aesthetics unique to the film medium, in the post 1990s moment the 'parallel' film culture follows the mode of literary

adaptation or/ and pleasure of 'realistic' dialogue drama presented with literary aesthetics.

### **The idea of Literary cinema as a 'Parallel' Cinema in the Post Liberalization Moment**

Shoma A. Chatterjee in her book recognized a new wave of Bengali films in the 1990s with films like *Ek Je Achhe Kanya*, *Unishe April* or *Titli* (Chatterjee, 2004). She states that when the monotony and the lack of art of the mainstream made 'us' disappointed, a 'ray of hope' could be sensed in this new stream of Bengali films that were 'good films' and were also commercially successful. What she found 'new' in this 'new' stream of (parallel) films was the 'new' point of view towards the 'not so new' subjects of their plots. In an *Anandabazar Patrika* article, Swapan Kumar Ghosh in recognizing this 'departure' of some new Bengali films saw them as carrying the legacy of good Bengali commercial films and described how these films remained 'parallel' to the contemporary mainstream (Ghosh, 2000). In Bengal, the origin of the art/parallel cinema discourse can be traced back to the late 1940s film society movement and the formation of the *Calcutta Film Society* (in 1947) "spearheaded by Satyajit Ray, who with his associates underlined the significance of cinema as a recognized art form" (Maitra, 1990). The film societies by organizing festivals, bringing out publications, arranging talks, took pride in "serving the cause of good cinema" and mobilizing the "hopes of a healthy film scene". The 1950s witnessed the release and international recognition of Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali*. The film had its theatrical debut and a special screening at the Museum of Modern Art in 1955. It was widely admired in the international festival circuit and in 1956 received the 'Best Human Document' award at the Cannes Film Festival. In the writings of film society members then, the split between

mainstream popular films and 'quality' films was maintained. Ray himself in his writings was critical of the 'quality' of average Indian films pointing towards their 'visual dissonances' and 'lack of maturity' in the fundamentals of film making (Ray, 1976). In 1965 Cine Central was established in Calcutta with film director Madhu Bose as the President and Satyajit Ray as the Vice President of this organization, to 'increase appreciation for good films among the general public'.

The second generation of 'art house' filmmakers like Goutam Ghose, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Utpalendu Chakraborty and Nabyendu Chatterjee emerged during the Indian New Wave movement of the 1970s. In India 'New Cinema' directors influenced by the auteuristic orientation of 1960s international art cinema engaged in an 'alternative' film practice that defined itself in opposition to the mainstream cinema (Binford, 1987). Aruna Vasudev points out how this new movement was born of 'governmental decision' and not from "the impetus of filmmakers rebelling against the existing popular cinema, (Thoraval, 2000) whereas critics like Iqbal Masud criticize this cinema's own version of orthodoxy and detachment from average viewers. Mira Reym Binford sees this cinema as a kind of second or alternative national cinema which demonstrates "the nation's progressive social commitments and modern cultural stance" internationally (Binford, 1987: 164). M. Madhava Prasad reads this cinema's realist aesthetics as a national, political project positioning it in the broader terrain of the state's ideological practice (Prasad, 1998) The New Cinema directors of India radically departed from the idea of the mainstream and the model of Indian popular cinema both in terms of film form and film content. For funding and distribution of their

films in many cases they had to rely on state organizations like the FFC that later became the NFDC and other state bodies. The FFC or the Film Finance Corporation was founded by the government in 1960 with the aim of giving loans to directors who wanted to make films outside the commercial circuit and of supporting films with small budgets by talented and promising directors. In 1980 the FFC merged with Film Export Corporation to form the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC).

This period of 'experimental' film making in India coincided with the death of Bengali cinema's superstar Uttam Kumar in the 1980s and a new political phase of Bengal when the Leftist front came to power in 1977 and took special interest in 'developing' film culture in Bengal. Before the formation of the West Bengal Film Development Corporation, the Government of West Bengal produced films like *Ganadebata* (Tarun Majumdar, 1979), *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (Satyajit Ray, 1980) or *Parshuram* (Mrinal Sen, 1980). In 1980 the West Bengal Colour Film & Sound Laboratory Corporation Limited was incorporated as a wholly owned Government organization in Bengal with the object of promoting and undertaking the improvement of cinema in the state. The name of the company was changed to West Bengal Film Development Corporation Limited (WBFDCCL) with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1983. Many remarkable films of the second generation of art house filmmakers were produced or co-produced by this organization on behalf of the government of West Bengal. For example, in 1981 with Gautam Ghose's *Dakhal* or in 1982 with Buddhadeb Dasgupta's *Grihayuddha*, or in 1983 with Utpalendu Chakraborty's *Chokh* or Saroj Dey's *Koni* (1986), the West Bengal government showed its investment, both literally and metaphorically, in 'good cinema'. But most of their films failed to

reach an audience for lack of proper distribution or lack of popular appeal. Kiranmoy Raha criticizes this 'second birth':...this resurgence, if so it can be called, seen in the eighties has been feeble compared to that of the fifties and the sixties. For one thing many of the films the new generation of filmmakers have made or are making are in Hindi. For another, except for Aparna Sen they appear to be overtly concerned with economic and social issues rather than with human ones (Raha, 1991: 81).

If writers like Kiranmoy Raha blamed their thematic concerns for not being crowd pullers, Someshwar Bhoomik explored the difficulties of state patronage in drawing a larger mass (Bhoomik, 1996).

Raha quoted filmmaker Gautam Ghose saying that, "art filmmakers (like him) are stagnating for the last fifteen years" (Raha, 1991: 81). Ghose stated that "films are being made, sent to the festivals and awards duly won- but that's virtually the end of it," implying that their films do not have audiences outside the limited festival and film society circuits. On the other hand, there were directors like Buddhadeb Dasgupta who did not believe in wider communication in their films. *Nandan* organized a face to face discussion with film maker Buddhadeb Dasgupta in 1993 where he was asked by someone why he or the second generation of art house filmmakers in Bengal did not get the minimum level of 'commercial success' that film makers like Satyajit Ray got. Dasgupta in this discussion said that he relied on a marginal film crowd that might watch his films and also said that he or film makers like him knew that they might never get a large film audience (Dasgupta, 1993). And he clearly expressed that his concern is to 'communicate' through his films with however small an audience he gets, and not necessarily to 'survive'

in the film market. Partha Raha has written about this newer generation of art house film makers that except Aparna Sen or Nabyendu Chattopadhyay no one else thought of the audience and preferred to confine themselves to the 'art film' maker category (Raha, 2004: 36). Raha has elaborated that earlier art film makers like Ray, Sen or Ghatak had producers like Pramod Lahiri, but contemporary film makers are not that 'fortunate' to have such producers. He has also pointed out that it would be a more useful step on behalf of the government if they would focus on the release of the art house films instead of just producing them.

The art cinema discourse in Bengal since its origin has been engaged in the over valuation of realism associated with 'parallel'/'serious' cinema and a criticism of the melodramatic form of mainstream films. In film society writings, this idea of polarized forms resulted in constructed boundaries between the two cinemas which could not be trespassed and that seemed in their very nature irreconcilable. Gaston Roberge discusses this discourse of polarization in the film society approach to cinema in detail, and especially in Chidananda Dasgupta's writings. According to Roberge, Dasgupta has worked out "the artificial opposition between box office and art" so fully that "it is almost impossible for him to say anything significant about the commercial cinema beyond rejecting it" (Roberge, 2010: 103). In the second generation of writers as well this split was maintained. And their focus was mostly confined to individual directors and their 'original work', aesthetic sense, auteuristic orientation, and art cinema's thematics that are of mature, intelligent, adult interest contrary to the thematics of escapism propagated by commercial film practice.

Here, in my paper I use the term 'parallel' as associated with this film practice to indicate its distinctive aesthetics and restricted release in relation to the Bengali mainstream cinema of this period. I draw the term 'parallel' from its usage by the press and other media discourses, and especially in the way they distinguish a body of films by certain filmmakers from the regular mainstream to demonstrate how this category is constructed in the production logic of cinematic practice, by filmic apparatus and also in the discourse generated around these films. Thomas Elsaesser looks at the concept of 'art cinema' not only as a distinct, formal-aesthetic style of narration but also as an 'institutional-pragmatic category' (Elsaesser, 2005). Similarly in my paper, I would like to examine the role of social and cultural institutions in the constructed-ness of this category apart from its film aesthetics and narrative style. For instance the publicity discourse of these films follows a literary pattern. I interviewed Mr. Uttam Kumar Basu, CEO of Cine Media a publicity firm for Bengali cinema who had worked for many of these films. He asserted that a group of filmmakers asked for a literary form for the posters, film trailers and other publicity tools. The font designing of films like *Shubha Mahurat*, *Ek Je Achhe Kanya*, *Bhalo Theko* and many others followed this literary aesthetics quite directly. The review columns as well praised the literary-ness of all of these films. And the journalistic discourse distinguished the 'quality' of these films and mentioned how superior they are from the average mainstream releases.

Here I must mention the cinema of Rituparno Ghosh as one of the key construct of this literary cinema of the post-liberalization period. With *Unishe April* (19<sup>th</sup> April) Rituparno Ghosh successfully constructed that pleasure of literary narrative. The film starring Aparna Sen and

Debashree Roy depicts the tale of relationship crisis between two women—a famous dancer mother and an alienated daughter. In a stormy night, they come close to each other and resolve past tensions. Immediately after the film received the National Award, media discourses showered praise upon Rituparno especially for his skill of portraying the interior world of the middle class lives with its inner drama, crisis of filial bond and their resolutions. With unmistakable precision Rituparno builds his style of transforming literary pleasure in film after films that touch a section of the Bengali middleclass cine lovers. And with *Dahan* (Crossfire), *Ashukh* (The Malaise), *Bariwali* (The Lady of the House) he became an adorable director among *Bhadra*, middleclass audience, due to the above mentioned qualities in his films. Question of 'good taste' often became the keyword in discussing Rituparno Ghosh as an auteur director and this literary quality became one of the most important constituent in this discourse.

And this literary-ness can very well be observed in the media-hype before the release of any Feluda films. The posters, talk shows, star interviews worked as different tools with the purpose of making us well-informed about these would-be-released films. Thanks to Satyajit Ray's legendary literary creation and Sandip Ray's film making talent that combine into this kind of yearly celebration. But is it the simple *raison d'être* working behind the success of each of these films' plot? Perhaps the reason lies beyond these filmic texts and more with the idea of filming and viewing a 'literary' film. Feluda first appeared in *Sandesh* in 1965 in Satyajit Ray's novel *Feludar Goyendagiri* followed by a series of Feluda stories in next two decades. And later Ray himself extends the fantasy in its filmic avatar with *Sonar Kella* and *Jay Baba Felunath* in



the 1980s. Children's film became an important film genre with Feluda and some other works; firstly because of the use of colour film technology that became the dominant mode of film making in the 1980s providing a fabricated world of fantasy and secondly as an easy solution of the crisis of *bhadralok* literary filmic practice.

Feluda as an icon and also as an idea is crucial and almost inevitable in the *bhadralok* practice of self projection. When we discuss the re-birth of Feluda on screen with Sandip Ray's adaptations of Ray's Feluda stories there is something beyond the 'old wine in a new bottle' strategy. Feluda quite effectively generates that nostalgic pleasure of the *Anandamela*, *Shuktara* and *Kishorebharati* generation who has grown up with fantastical world of ghosts, thieves and science fictions of Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay novels, bitter-sweet tales of Dulendra Bhoomik and *Tintin*, *Batul the great* and *Nonte-Fonte* comics. But the pleasure also works beyond this nostalgia mode in an aspirational model functioning on an intersecting plane of Bengali literary world, Satyajit Ray and our desire for that literary-ness. The publicity hype and the media reviews of Feluda films create a world of Bengali adolescence immersed in reading Feluda stories, and novels in pujabarshiki issues of *Anandamela*. Perhaps this regeneration of lost childhood pleasure in popular public sphere is less of re-generation and more of re-creation of a literary self. As memory studies scholars argued that nostalgia is not only about the past realities of childhood and adolescence but also about creating self imagery in matured adults. The nostalgia for our 'lost literary self' in Feluda films worked on this logic. It's more like an aspirational fantasy of having and losing a literary self of us that we never had actually. It's nostalgia for a make belief world of 'our past life'

that we did not have but still we always love to reclaim. Perhaps the popularity of Feluda films is a story more about a responding to this cultural crisis of a class and less of its own cultic values and contemporary appeals. Not only a Feluda film but also films like *Byomkesh*, *Abar Byomkes*, or *Satyanweshi's* offer an opportunity to *bhadra* self to enhance that nostalgia for its literary base and the aspiration for it. A film on Samresh Majumdar's young detective Arjun is on the floor and media is working to re-generate its appeal. The media discourse on these literary films created a make-belief world that Bengalis are still spontaneously more inclined towards their literature and carry a literary base in their daily existence. Feluda, *Byomkesh*, Arjun narratives promise that aspirational journey and regular practice even create a new childhood of a generation lost in filmy music, Shaktimaan worship and video game thrills. The politics of literary film culture function to successfully create that aspirational journey.

### Conclusion: The Changes in the Contemporary Moments

In recent times the literary cinema discourse experienced some changes. Firstly the emergence of filmmakers like Srijit Mukherjee and Kamaleshwar Mukherjee in Bengali cinema re-defined the idea of 'parallel' itself within the industrial practice and also the discourse generated around this. The way films like *Mishar Rahasya* (Srijit Mukherjee, 2013) *Chander Pahar* (Kamaleshwar Mukherjee, 2014) were publicized in the mainstream media prior to its release and the pattern of grand release they followed are surely new milestones in the literary film practice. The idea and the need of the 'new literary parallel cinema' that was imagined and came into being in the late 1980s, was based on a 'crisis narrative' of the *bhadro* public sphere as I've discussed in this paper. Whatever the reason

may be, in last five/six years, public sphere discussions of Bengali cinema have moved from the 'crisis narrative' towards the 'celebration' of Bengali films. And in this celebratory account, the news of recognition of Bengali art house films on national/ international film festivals is shared along with the 'record breaking hits' of the mainstream releases. And the question that Moinak Biswas has asked regarding the broader context of *bhadralok* culture is relevant to mention. Biswas has asked, "does that bhadra circle exist in the same form?" (Biswas, 2008: 203). Surely it does not. If one observes the kind of quasi English Bengali languages used by the radio jockeys of the popular FM stations, the Song and Dance competition on reality tv shows or simply the nature of 'humour' in popular standup comedy shows like *Mirakkel* it will be clear *bhadralok* taste does not follow the simplistic binary of literary/non literary or vulgar/ artistic in a similar manner. And new age filmmakers of Tollygunge industry engages with this neo taste discourse. So if on the one hand filmmakers like Anjan Dutta or Mainak Bhaumik construct the characters of their films affluent in the quasi Bengali English dialect, on the other hand experimental filmmaker Q made Bengali slangs an important part of his film making oeuvre. This is a sharp departure from the literary cinema mode of the earlier decades.

Secondly a film making style has emerged within the ambit of Bengali cinema that offers a possible critique of the literary cinema and *bhadralok* cultural code of literary-ness. This critique can be studied both in the technicalities of the films and in their narrative design. *Herbert* both the film (2006) by Suman Mukhopadhyay and the original Nabarun Bhattacharya novel on which it is based, in its very approach subverts the *bhadralok* belief system regarding the question of cultural superiority, literary taste, *bhadralok*

sensibility and other charismatic self-perception of this class. Aneek Dutta's *Bhuter Bhabishyat* (2012) on the other hand presented a unique mix of literary mode and masala elements like song and dance sequences hitherto unknown in the Bengali literary film practice. Finally with more recent examples like *Kangal Malshat* (Suman Mukhopadhyay, 2013) and *Taser Desh* (Q, 2013) Bengali literary cinema attain a new phase of subversion. These two films are literary adaptations of Nabarun Bhattacharya and Rabindranath Tagore texts respectively and the way they distort the idea of refined taste, literary-ness and art and aesthete is significant. Moreover the change in the distribution pattern of Bengali films with regular slots given at the multiplexes outside of Bengal, increased budget of Bengali films, intervention of new technology, corporate house investments have a role in the changing scenario of Bengali cinema. And this overall change has an impact on the nature of Bengali films released in recent times. That does not mean that the mainstream masala films has taken a backseat at the box office; nor that literary films are no more treated as something of high quality in the public sphere. The thing is that the idea of literary film practice as 'parallel' cinema and the binary that it formed with the masala flicks works in different fashion in the contemporary. How these refashioning of cultural code and formation of new taste discourse are affecting the contemporary Bengali cinematic practice are not within the scope of this paper. This paper is just an attempt to read the literary mode of Bengali cinema in the post liberalization period and the policy and the politics associated with it.

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- Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Aseema Sinha, *The Regional Roots of Developmental Politics in India: A Divided Leviathan* (Indiana University Press, 2005). Along with this historical account we must remember that in the being and becoming of the *bhadralok* class, the changing idea of the self, socio-political transformations, the emergence of newer belief systems and other major and minor social phenomena have always acted on this category as in the case of any other social and cultural type. A problem arises if we completely ignore the slipperiness of this term while using it in history writing. And yet, this term is a necessary signifier in Bengal's cultural history.
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