

Sons and Fathers: Uttam Kumar in *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*

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By
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that dissertation entitled “**Sons and Fathers: Uttam Kumar in *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*,**” submitted by **Disha Ghosh** bearing Reg. No. **20HCHL07** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy in Comparative Literature is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or institution to award any degree or diploma.

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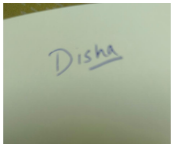
DECLARATION

I, **Disha Ghosh**, hereby declare that this Dissertation entitled, “**Sons and Fathers: Uttam Kumar in *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*,**” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Prof. J. Bheemaiah** is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or institution to award any degree or diploma.

Date: 15-01-2023

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A small, square image showing a handwritten signature in blue ink on a light-colored background. The signature appears to be 'Disha' with a horizontal line underneath it.

Disha Ghosh
Signature of the Student

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines two phases in the career of the Bengali film star Uttam Kumar (1926-1980), focusing on the construction of masculinity through his persona in the two films *Deya Neya* ('The Romantic Exchange'¹) and *Bagh Bondi Khela* ('The Hunting Game'). The decade between the film, when the actor moved from doing only 'romantic' roles to 'atypical' experimental roles, reveals the social history of two kinds of Bengali bhadralok culture of the time. *Deya Neya* (1963) is about the making of the romantic hero, while *Bagh Bondi Khela* (1975) is where Uttam Kumar plays an unredeemed villain.

These films represent two different kinds of masculinity through the image of Uttam Kumar. As gender exists on a spectrum, neither film shows him as a 'manly man' or an 'effeminate man.' I have examined gender relations between men and women in the setting of family spaces to understand the making of masculinity in these films. To understand the making of masculinity through the persona of Uttam Kumar, I have also briefly referred to the contemporary films in Bengal that acknowledge *mahanayak*; as a background to situate *mahanayak* Uttam Kumar's image as a 'cultural icon' with whom Bengalis continue to identify.

While there is a significant amount of work on Uttam Kumar and his films in the Bengali language. Scholars like Sayandeb Chowdhury, Moinak Biswas, and Sharmishta Gooptu have recently published a range of works in English, giving Bengali cinema a global reach that helps the *Prabasi Bangalis* (Bengalis outside Bengal) to reclaim their cultural roots.

¹ Translations of the film's titles are by Sayandeb Chowdhury (*Uttam Kumar: A life in Cinema* 2021).

This dissertation consists of three chapters. In the first chapter, I discussed that masculinity is an ambiguous concept; Uttam Kumar cannot fit into either type of masculinity, 'effeminate and manly.'

I have also discussed the image of the modern woman, *bhadramahila*. In chapter two, I discussed melodrama as a family genre and situated Uttam Kumar's persona in recent times. Finally, in chapter three, I analyzed the making of masculinity through the lens of gender roles in the primary films of the dissertation.

Masculinity/ Men

The concepts of gender relations and masculinity have received significant scholarly attention. This dissertation analyzes the two primary films based on the work of Judith Butler, Simone De Beauvoir, and Todd W. Reeser to gain a deeper understanding of society's perceptions of gender and masculinity.

Judith Butler quotes the title of Denise Riley's work *Am That Name?* to signify that woman is not just a woman but more. She is also embedded in relations of 'ethnicity, race, class, and sexuality.' Thus, Butler argues that it becomes difficult to separate 'culture' from gender (4–5). In the same way, we cannot discuss 'men' as a discrete category. Todd W. Reeser argues that the 'idea of a man' can change over time and across cultures (1–2). As a result, neither women nor men can be analyzed outside of their culture and society. To build on this argument, I read Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, where she wrote,

'The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage.'

(439)

The status of women in society is determined by their marriageable state, which makes marriage and women 'inseparable' (Beauvoir 439). In the primary films of the dissertation, apart from analyzing the construction of masculinity through the image of Uttam Kumar as the 'bhadralok star,' I have also studied the representation of the image of the 'new woman' in the 'family space.'

Masculinities in Bengal

Scholar Miralini Sinha examines the stereotypes of 'effeminate Bengalis' and British men as 'manly men' in her 1995 book *Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*. In this dissertation, I examine Uttam Kumar's character in both films, shifting between 'manly' and 'feminine' without settling for either.

Furthermore, Sinha explains how 'babus' came to refer exclusively to describe Bengali bhadralok from a term used for all Indians. During the 19th century, anthropologist Herbert Risley associated Bengalis with the 'Mangolian-Dravidian race.' This association with race partly contributed to Bengali men being considered 'feminine' (21). Other absurd factors include the state's 'geographical location,' 'dietary habits,' 'marriage practices,' and other 'cultural customs.' Miralini Sinha writes that figures like Tagore, Bankimchandra, Swami Vivekananda, and Sarala Debi were against the image of Bengali 'effeminate babu' and opposed the idea by encouraging young men to go to gymnasiums to gain physical strength and oppose Britisher's beliefs. All of these later turned extremely militant against British rule (21).

Ranajit Guha, in *An Indian Historiography of India: Hegemonic Implication of a Nineteenth Century Agenda* (1988), claimed that middle-class literate Indians emphasized mapping Indian history. The Bengali fictional writer Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, who stressed writing

Bengali history in the mother tongue in *Bangadarshan* (1860), advocated the promotion of the concept of *charitabal* (character building) over *bahubal* (physical development) following the 1857 revolt (203-205). The construction of the Bengali men based on the holistic growth of character helps challenge the image of 'effeminate' Bengali men.

Image of the Bhadramahila

The primary films of the dissertation is set in the patriarchal settings of 'family spaces.' I have read Partha Chatterjee, Tanika Sarkar, Dulali Nag, and the more recent work of Sudipta Kaviraj to further the argument of the construction of gender roles and the image of modern women (*Bhadramahila*) in the chapters.

Partha Chatterjee, in *Nation and its Fragments* (1993), discusses the position of the modern woman in Bengal. Social reformers and nationalist men from the early nineteenth century declared that women should be pushed into the household and claimed to be part of the 'high' realm of the spiritual so that men could concentrate on the issues of administration, which were lacking during the colonial era. Because the 'inner' sanctum is indicative of 'holiness,' there was fear that education could destroy it as it could result in a western lifestyle and 'Christian' learning (Chatterjee 128). With the introduction of the Indian school for women, the earlier harmful assumptions about women's education changed. In addition to learning the art of being modest, gentle, and mannered, the women were taught to do household chores differently, as opposed to men's 'animal nature,' as Bhudev Mukhopadhyay writes in *Paribarik Prabandhan* (Essays on Family; 1882).

In *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religious and Cultural Nationalism* (2001), Tanika Sarkar analyzes how nationalists portrayed women as goddesses to restrain their freedom. She

believes the image of the woman was an essential part of the nationalist agenda and writes that women were divided into five images of Goddesses in popular culture. The first is of *Annapurna* (goddess of food), and the second is of *Jagaddhatri* (goddess of the universe), often represented in the work of Bankimchandra. The third is *Bharatmata*, constructed by Abanindranath Tagore, represents people's grief and weakness. The fourth is Goddess *Kali*, who stands for destruction and is often represented as standing above his husband, Lord Shiva. One of the female characters (Kalyani) in *Bagh Bondi Khela* resembles the same spirit of *Kali* in one scene where she stands against her husband, Uttam Kumar (Bhabesh Banerjee). The fifth is the goddess *Mahishashurmardini Durga*, who kills a demon representing good over evil as a domesticated woman visiting her home with her children (Sarkar 250-254). Some female characters of *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela* have similar attributes to the image of the Goddesses, while others differ. (More on this in chapter 3)

A long history of 19th-20th century Bengali literature reflects the same attributes and significance of the characters in *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*. Sudipta Kaviraj, in *Invention of Private Life* (2015), claimed that novels and bildungsroman are modern genres in Bengali society. Novels like *Gora* by Tagore elucidate lengthy conversations about love and falling in love. These novels also celebrated the 'ordinary' way characters fall for each other in the story. Such novels also created literary tropes, typical characters, and styles that other contemporary novelists generally used. According to Kaviraj, literature was the reflection of society and reflected the changes that were happening around the time. Such a generalization from the novels helps the real-life married couple to escape the alternative spaces when they go to theaters to watch Uttam Kumar romance Suchitra Sen onscreen (467-469).

As characters from novels become part of readers' lives like shadows, Kaviraj writes that they can affect readers more deeply. Characters like Gora, Devdas, Sucharita, and Lavanya² are a source of knowledge, power, and courage for their readers, who question society like the characters they read (24-25). This new form of writing about the 'ordinary man' shifts the importance from caste to merit; a man's caste becomes his destination for all aspects of life. In novels, the characters are more unrestrained (Kaviraj 74-75). The new genre of novel is about new lives in the modern cityscape around common urban issues, with no relation to a particular caste. The constitution of these 'ordinary' characters is to represent them leading an 'ambiguous' life. The protagonists are absurd, flawed, and fragile. These characters shed light on the life of the readers as they are portraying to be facing similar problems (Kaviraj 75-76).

In light of these above observations, I have read *Deya Neya* as a bildungsroman of an 'ordinary' man who falls in love with a city girl. Furthermore, *Bagh Bondi Khela* has a parallel subplot story of the unrequited love of Rajesh for Dolon, his childhood friend, thus depicting the failures of 'romance.' (Story in chapter 3)

Continuing from Sudipta Kaviraj, I read "Love in the time of nationalism: Bengali Popular films from the 1950s" by Dulali Nag, which analyzes Suchitra Sen and Uttam Kumar's *Agnipariksha* ('Ordeal of Fire' 1954). The article situates Suchitra Sen as the first female actress to portray an 'ambiguous' modern educated woman on screen (780). Nag contextualizes Suchitra Sen's identity as a modern woman with the other fictive contemporary characters like Aarati from Satyajit Ray's *Mahanagar* (The Metropolis) and Bimala from *Ghore Baire* (Home and the World) 1984 film adaptation of Rabindranath Tagore's 1916 novel. Nag identifies Sen with the fictive figures created by artists like Ray and Tagore to make Suchitra Sen part of 'high popular

² Characters from Rabindranath Tagore, Saratchandra, and Bankimchandra's novels.

culture.' (780). Modernity and urbanization are the dual chaos for the successive generations of bhadralok led by Bankimchandra and Tagore. *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela* represent the 'new generation' of the middle class who face the dual issues of the modern and urban age.

Melodramas: Genre of the Family

I read a few books from a long list of works on melodramas to understand melodrama as the 'family genre.' Melodramas have roots in many genres, not only in novels and dramas but also in films. According to Abu Lila Lughod, the ordinary nature of Egyptian soap operas helps the viewers develop individualistic spirits. As melodramas are 'domestic,' they are invariably connected with emotions and thus related to women observed by Western scholars (117). In addition, I read William Dissanayake, who noted that 'suffering' plays a crucial role in Asian melodrama. Although human suffering is essential in western films, the importance of repentance and existential crisis in Asian films is different (4). The trope of 'suffering' and emotions connected with the woman is often associated with family.

Indian scholars like Madhava Prasad study the Hindi 'feudal family romance' of the 1950- 1960s and differentiates them as melodrama and realism. Melodrama was central to the women's audience in Hollywood. However, Huysser, quoted by Prasad, focuses on the Bombay film Industry, where melodrama draws attention from mixed and varied audiences (56). The form of the melodrama finds its separate meaning not in 'thematic' but from social change. The different audiences, themes, and narrative episodes are some elements of melodrama. Mary Ann Doane, cited by Prasad, writes that melodrama has been defined in various ways throughout the years (57).

Melodramas in Bengal

"Heterosexual couple formation, the goal of coming together of man and woman, lies in the heart of conventional films narrativity almost, globally."

(Biswas 133).

It becomes evident through the above quote by Moinak Biswas that even if 'family space' is essential in Bengali and Hindi cinema, more emphasis is on the 'couple.' Biswas writes about the 'popular melodramas' of the 50s and the 60s in Bengal, which mainly starred Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen because of their continuous blockbusters. This era in Bengali cinema is acknowledged as Uttam- Suchitra era, even though the film does not feature them (122). *Deya Neya* belongs to this period; Uttam Kumar is at the center of the 'family romance,' depicting a 'family man' with new values of desires and independence.

Biswas mentions that family dispute was represented in films to understand society's social and political changes (126). By the late 1960s, the Uttam-Suchitra phase in the Bengali industry is over, and a new phase begins in the 70s. Biswas analyzed this new phase in the melodrama as focused on 'violence' and crime and termed these films 'criminal hero' and 'revenge' films.

To build further on this, scholars Sayandeb Chowdhury and Smita Banerjee discuss Uttam Kumar as the 'pillar' of the Bengali film industry at the end of the 1960s as he did more 'experimental' characters which suited his age (Banerjee 52). *Bagh Bondi Khela* belongs in this phase as Uttam Kumar plays a machiavellian 'anti-hero' and a manipulative father. In a decade after *Deya Neya*, Uttam Kumar turns from a son to a figure of the father, performing in 'crossover' films like *Bagh Bondi Khela*. Chowdhury gives three methods of charting Uttam

Kumar's career: the first is to identify his best-loved romantic films between 1954 and 1961, the second is to identify his role as a famous and established hero from 1962 to 1969, and the third is to identify his downfall from 1970 to 1975. The primary films of this dissertation are from the second (*Deya Neya*) and third (*Bagh Bondi Khela*) periods. He can also be studied through the genre shifts in Bengali films from romantic films to period dramas, thrillers, comedies, and social crises of the 1970s (9).

Uttam Kumar: 'The Icon'

To understand the idea of 'cultural icons,' I read "Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" by Walter Benjamin, who writes about 'cult and exhibition' values. A piece of 'art with cult' value has an immovable significance. 'Exhibition value' refers to movable things, such as photographs, that can be reprinted and circulated. The image of Uttam Kumar as a 'cult' figure in Bengal is a way for the Bengalis to keep in touch with its *bharalok's* past as his films are on 'self-images,' writes Sharmishtha Gooptu (100-101).

On the other hand, Moniak Biswas writes in "The Couple and their Spaces: Harana Sur as Melodrama Now" that the television industry shows old films as 'embedding the past within the present;' hence Uttam Kumar films have an 'exhibition value' in the modern technological era.

"Uttam Kumar remains what he died as: the greatest icon ever to have graced Bengali cinema and one among the principal cultural protagonists of the entire past- Post- Tagorean Bengali public life."

(Chowdhury 7-8).

This above quote is from Sayandeb Chowdhury in *Uttam Kumar: Life in Cinema* (2021), where the scholar attempts to document the afterlife of Uttam Kumar as a Bengali icon popular in Bengal in contemporary times. Chowdhury also traces the cultural significance of two other

idols, along with Uttam Kumar that is of Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray, in the daily lives of Bengali citizens; by observing their presence in pictures, posters, newspapers, salons, public transport, studios, daily conversations in Bengal (4). These three men stand as the symbol of 'bengaliness,' retaining the 'self-image' of Bengali bhadralok culture, writes Gooptu (as mentioned above), keeping the essence of 'feel-good' quality among the new generations of *Prabasi Bangali* (100-101).

Even today, Uttam Kumar continues to reside in the hearts of Bengalis, unlike other actors who have reached the peak of fame and fallen from grace. However, Chowdhury also documents the rise and fall of his long career in Bengal, starting with *Agniporikha* (Ordeals with fire 1954), which turned him into a star overnight (7). The scholar writes that the rise of romantic melodrama led to his stardom, so films like *Agniporikha* (1954), *Deya Neyo* (1963), and *Chawa Pawa* (1959) are some films that represent his star appeal on the big screen. These romantic films were part of 'metropolis melodrama' (based in cities). As he aged, he began to experiment and try new roles, which were 'atypical' roles that suited his growing age from the end of the 60s, such as *Bagh Bondi Khela* (1975), is one film where he is not playing the quintessential romance hero (Chowdhury 9-10). Chowdhury writes that 'metropolar' movies are a breakaway, and so are 'crossover' films like *Bagh Bondi Khela* (1975). The 'crossover' genre included films with social content, gray characters, and critique of society (11). (Read about melodramas in chapter 2)

Apart from his choice of films in the last years of his career, his participation in *Debi Durga Tiharini* (1976), a program that replaced the long traditional *Mahishasurmardini* program³ on All India Radio, was another mistake in the last five years before his downfall (Chowdhury 56-57).

³ A mantra to evoke Goddess Durga, broadcasted through the medium of radio every year before Durga Pujo celebrations.

This recording also marked the downfall of Uttam Kumar's already deteriorating career. With all his ups and downs, Uttam Kumar is still remembered as the *mahanayak* 'matinee hero' of Bengal.

Chapter One

Romance Hero to an Unredeemed Villian: Uttam Kumar

This chapter aims to locate the two kinds of bhadralok masculinity in Bengal through the star figure of Uttam Kumar (1926-1980) in his two films *Deya Neya* (A Romantic Exchange; 1963) and *Bagh Bondi Khela* (The Hunting Game; 1975). I have borrowed from Sharmistha Gooptu's idea of the meaning of 'bengaliness' and the shifting nature of 'Bengali culture' to look into the construction of bhadralok masculinity in the two primary films of the dissertation. Bhadraklok is a 'social class' from the nineteenth century that has gained socially and economically through access to Western English learning. According to Gooptu, there were three types of bhadraloks: 'elites,' *madhyabitta* (middle strata), and *nimna-madhyabitta* (lower middle class). As a result of partition and the rise of other elite communities, the Bengali bhadralok lost their social position, leaving behind the idea of *bhadrata*, which means 'gentle, kind, and civil' (4). In *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*, Uttam Kumar represents the two different bhadralok figures. In *Deya Neya*, he is a *bhadra*⁴ family man, while in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, he transgresses his role and turns a bully, an old patriarch figure.

Over the years, scholars have studied that masculinity and femininity do not have a fixed meaning. Despite society's rigid acceptance of the blurring of masculine and feminine concepts, they have nevertheless been present in films and literature to question rigidity. In chapter one, I will introduce the two kinds of Bhadraklok masculinity manifested in the literature and cinema of Bengal. The chapter focuses on two types of masculinity in the career of 'matinee' actor Uttam Kumar to understand the blurring of masculine and feminine.

⁴ Bhaskar Sarkar writes that being *bhadra* means cultural and educated (Gooptu 4).

Furthermore, the chapter questions the preconceived ideas of masculinity and discusses the image of the modern-educated women of the post-Independence era. The dichotomy of masculinity and femininity cannot be studied in isolation, as both men and women are associated with the identity of race, class, ethnicity, and power (Butler 4). Hence, it becomes imperative that we study the dichotomy of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' through social structures of marriage, class, and caste, as I shall discuss in this chapter.

This dissertation will focus on the characters of Uttam Kumar, acclaimed as the 'Bengali icon,' popularly known as the *mahanayak* (superstar) since his first steps as a hero in *Agnipariksha* (Ordeal of fire; 1954) in Tollygunge.⁵ In the close analysis of the two films, *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*, starring Uttam Kumar, the star persona of the hero brings into question the conventional performances of gender roles. Many of his roles blur the lines between traditional expectations of 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities.

The roles he has played question the strict boundaries on sex/gender and men as masculine and women as feminine in our society. Western scholars like Judith Butler have written about the spectrum of gender along with Indian scholars like Miralini Sinha (read below), who have focused on 'Bengali masculinity' specifically. I have combined these various scholarships to look into the stardom of Uttam Kumar in this dissertation.

This chapter will question the notions around gender and sex, which assume masculinity and femininity as 'natural' and already present in gendered bodies. Judith Butler writes on the dichotomy of sex/gender. In conventional concepts, sex is biological, and gender is cultural, so gender is unchanging because of the already fixed sex of a person. Nevertheless, Butler argues

⁵ A place in South Kolkata famous as Tollywood, the domain of the Bengali Film Industry,

that if gender is a construction, it has no connection with the sex of the body. So, men's bodies do not always have to be masculine, and women's bodies do not always have to be feminine. By accepting gender as an independent construct, men and women can assume both masculine and feminine qualities (6).

Gender is 'cultural,' which implies that masculine and feminine characteristics are social constructs. According to scholar Todd W Reeser's study, traditionally, masculinity consists of qualities like a muscular physique, intellectual, and power as opposed to femininity which is associated naturally with being 'docile' and 'submissive.' Scholars have argued that traits like being weak/firm and having a muscular or lean body are not always 'natural.' Reeser has also observed in his study that masculinity mainly goes 'unnoticed' or is 'detected in excess'; for example, a crying man is not masculine enough, an 'effeminate' male lacks masculine traits, while a bodybuilder displays 'excessive' masculine attributes (Reeser 1). We know that masculinity is a spectrum and has no essential qualities, as proved by studies written by Reeser and Indian sociologist Radhika Chopra in *Reframing Masculinities: Narrating the Supportive Practice Of Men* (2010). She writes about the 'everyday' as her central structure to understand relations of 'support and care' between old and young generations of men. Such relationships based on 'care' are represented in South Asian men and must be considered crucial in the community (4) to understand relations between men. Hence, men and women are not born with masculine or feminine traits but are products of 'social and cultural influences.'

In the two films, *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*, we encounter male characters played by actor Uttam Kumar shifting and staying amongst these attributes of being 'effeminate men' to

representing ‘manly’ men on screen. However, none shows absolute traits of one or the other. Prasanta (Uttam Kumar), the lead in *Deya Neya*, sings, performs, and manifests an emotional side with his mother and his friends (As discussed in chapter 3). Bhabesh, played by Uttam Kumar, is a powerful and cunning man in *Bagh Bondi Khela*. He is a bully in the film who physically does not harm the other characters but has the muscle power to do it for him. Uttam Kumar is acting outside his comfort zone in this film. The masculinity he portrays on screen in his best works is not that of an action hero but of a ‘family man.’ He is most popular for roles in films such as *Deya Neya*, where he plays a ‘romance hero.’ While in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, his character did not physically harm anyone; instead, he hired goons to do so, which added to his bullying characteristics since he is not only cunning but manipulative.

To understand gender roles and the construction of masculinity in familial spaces of Bengali films, the following sections will trace the various masculinities constructed in Bengal, including the resistance to these constructions.

Effeminate Men

There are ranges in masculinity as in femininity. However, to understand some of the radical ideas present in the spectrum of gender, I have studied two forms of ‘masculinity’ broadly accepted in society: ‘feminine’ men and ‘manly’ men. Miralini Sinha studies the stereotypes of the ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ in the political environment of 1880-90 in the book *Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century* (1995). The assumption is that labels on/by colonizers and colonized are uncertain; they are historical constructions based on the political and economic background of British India.

Moreover, 'colonial masculinity' was influenced both by Indian and English ideas. The construction of the colonial masculinity image coincided with the rise of the new woman, the rise of the working class, the adaptation of western ideals, and the feminist retaliation of the 1880s-90s (Sinha 1-2).

In contrast to natural or biological characteristics, male and female attributes are determined by external factors. In the past, anglicists have tried to shape native Indians according to their convenience. It was essential for orientalist to trade and rule in India in a way that did not harm the native population. Natives, in turn, showed interest in the lifestyle and learnings of the West; they became a version of the colonizers by learning and working under them. This group was termed 'effeminate babus' (Sinha 4).

Indian scholars have traced the etymology of the term 'effeminate,' which refers to all Indians but later was used to mention only the Bengali bhadralok. The term 'effeminate' was first; used to refer to all Indians. Sinha gave the example of Richard Orne's *History of the Military Transaction of British Nation in Idostan*, in which Bengalis are considered to have a weak personality. Sinha studied the Consent Act (1891) to define the idea of 'feminine' men (18). The image of the Bengali men was 'sexual' in nature. Sinha points out that homosexuality is thought of as 'non-masculine' by the colonizers. The colony compared Bengali men with the tribe of India, who considered them 'less manly,' and connected them with 'homosexual' gay men referred to as 'effeminate' (Sinha 18-19). Colonizers constructed the stereotypes of the 'effeminate' Bengali based on irrational factors of geographical location and Bengal's social and cultural atmosphere. The anthropologist Herbert Risley in the latter part of the 19th century, conducted a scientific study in which he found out that Bengalis are part of the 'Mongol-Dravidian race.' This finding leads to physical separation and a comparison between Bengalis and the rest of the

communities of India. The Colonizers gave anthropological reasons to believe that Bengali men were 'effeminate' such as their staple diet was rice, the climate of Bengal was hot, and due to child marriages along with bearing offspring at an early age. Sinha has argued that the colonizers exercised their power and produced absurd reasons (as above) for the natives to believe in their 'supremacy.'

With time, the definition of 'effeminate' has narrowed to only the middle-class, educated Bengali. The national Indian Congress (1885) is known to have consisted of such 'effeminate Bengali babus.' *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and *Bengalee*, published by bhadralok, reaffirmed that educated elites are called 'babus' (Sinha 15-16). The term 'babu' did not always have 'negative associations,' but before the 19th century, it was an alternative to 'Mister' in colonial India. However, with the turn of the 19th century, satires were published that referred to prosperous Bengali shopkeepers and traders as 'babus' (Sinha 17).

Sudipta Kaviraj mentions that writers like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay use the term 'babu' to refer to the middle-class elites from the 'modern urban city of Calcutta' (267). By the late 19th century, the term 'babu' intertwined with those Bengalis who were economically well off. The Bengalis did not have business skills like the Parsis of Bombay and the Europeans, relying primarily on their English-speaking talent, providing them with administration and professional work. In a glossary; of English proverbs in India, *Hobson-Jobson* (1880), 'babu' was identified as 'indigenous clerks' who write in the English language (Sinha 18). The viewers watch economically well-off Bengali bhadralok, often addressed as 'babus' in *Deya Neya*, as Mr. B.K Roy (Prasanta's father). In *Bagh Bondi Khela*, Uttam Kumar is addressed as Bhobo 'babu' to depict his authority and power in the film. The term exists and is still prevalent, even today, but with comic connotations due to the circulation of comic literature such as satires and comic plays

written by the bhadralok and English writers to warn the Bengalis about imitating the English lifestyle.

This image of the 'effeminate babu' was a British attempt to isolate Bengalis who attempted to follow the English example and rise economically. The image was refuted in society, as scholar Rosselli cited by Sinha, observes that gymnasiums/*akhara* reopened in the late 19th century as retaliation from the Bengalis. Figures like Tagore, Bankimchandra, Swami Vivekananda, and Sarala Debi challenged the image of Bengali 'effeminate babu.' This opposition to the image of 'effeminate' Bengali men later took to extreme nationalistic ideas against the British (21).

The Concepts of *Bahubal* and *Charitbal*

Deepa Srinivas read about the idea of a 'perfect man' constructed by Bankimchandra, a Bengali writer of the nineteenth century, to oppose the image of 'effeminate Bengali men.' Srinivas looks into Bankimchandra's concept of *Anushilan*, which means to grow, the inherent human capability of holistic growth. A historical example of Bankim's 'perfect man' is found in *Krsnacarita Krishna*. Bankimchandra's characters restore Hindu traditions along with preserving western science. Srinivas writes that *Amar Chitra Katha*⁶ invokes the virtues of 'tolerance,' 'persistence,' and 'companionship,' and Bankimchandra represents 'force,' 'endeavor,' 'heroism,' and 'tenacity' (100-104).

Ranajit Guha, in *An Indian Historiography of India: Hegemonic Implication of a Nineteenth Century Agenda*, writes on Bankimchandra's ideas on *bahubal* (physical development) and *charitabal* (character building). Bankimchandra revised the teachings from Chaitanya and Navyanyaya and poems from Jayden and Vidyapati to construct his idea of the 'perfect man.' The concept of *bahubal* intertwines history and writing with power. Bankimchandra denied the

⁶ Children's comic books.

concept of *bahubal* and believed that *charitabal* (character building) became more crucial after the mutiny than *bahubal* (physical development) (Guha 203-205).

Besides the debate on 'effeminate' Bengali men, Deepa Srinivas constructs the notion of a 'manly' man based on the stereotypes and prejudices propagated by *Amar Chitra Katha* and Viswa Hindu Parishad (1964) that promotes Hindutva ideology and cultural values. The foundations of Anant Pai's⁷ institute are the same as those of Bankimchandra's values. Srinivas (1996) criticizes society and its education for causing youth insecurity and violent impulses. Pai created Partha: The institute of Personality Development and advertised it in *Amar Chitra Katha* (1980) edition.

He writes that children should learn the three C's ('Character, Confidence, and Courage') and the R's ('Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic'). In Bankimchandra's fiction, the heroes solve social problems in the stories, which inspired *Amar Chitra Katha* and Partha Institute (Srinivas 96-99).

There was an attempt by Bankimchandra during colonial times to restore the idea of a 'manly' Bengali man who could protect the nation and its women, which institutes like Partha reclaimed to restore the nation and its youth in the 90s. The primary films in the dissertation embody the nature of this generation of men who believe in nurturing character rather than physical strength.

Men in Hindi Films

Srinivas writes about comic literature and mentions the making of men/masculinity in the Hindi film industry. Specifically, Srinivas cited Madhava Prasad (1998), stating that Hindi films produced between Independence and the 1970s belong to the genre of 'feudal family romance.'

In these films, traditional social structures are represented alongside modern society, which does not question the hierarchy of social classes. Due to the uprising of the 1960s, Hindi cinema

⁷ Author of *Amar Chitra Katha*.

adopted new changes. They present class, gender, and the generational gap within the ‘old feudal forms.’ While in 1960, actors auditioned as they portrayed rich upper caste/class roles. In the 1970s, heroes performed as everyday citizens belonging to the laboring class (93-94). In *Deya Neya* (1963), we see a similar plot where Prasanta belongs to an upper-class, well-to-do *bhadra* family. Moreover, in the 1975 release, *Bagh Bondi Khela* is a ‘revenge and criminal’ genre about an old villain and his son. (More about this in chapter 3)

Fatherhood

Generally, parents are expected in any 'conventional society' to fit in their ‘assumed’ gender roles, where the mother is the 'caregiver.' and the father is the 'provider' who takes no interest in the emotional growth of the child but only in the child's social role. The primary films in this dissertation are about the relationship between father and son in a patriarchal setting of the family realm.

Deya Neya portrays Uttam Kumar as a modern son opposed to his father's belief. There is a reversal of roles in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, where Uttam Kumar plays the ‘aged father’ partially absent from his son's upbringing. As literature influences society and gets influenced in turn, real-life characters provide insight into the primary characters of the films. Violence plays a less prominent role in *Deya Neya*. However, it is present in *Bagh Bondi Khela* to portray Uttam Kumar as a bully and violent figure. Despite not being physically violent in the film, he still hangs on to his violent side, which makes him manipulative. On the plot level, he pretends to be a ‘good father’ to manipulate his son. (More on fatherhood in chapter 3) Uttam Kumar is renowned for his romantic and family man image in his 1940-1960s films. Hence his ‘experimental’ roles, which he played as he grew older, were not popular among his fans; as for them, he always resembles the ‘romantic matinee hero;’ despite his growing age.

The films *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela* question the deep-rooted beliefs of what is a 'masculine man' in the context of the 'family space' through the dynamics of the father-son duo. Both films are at another level, not just about the making of bhadralok masculinity but about 'old/new patriarchy,' as were most of the other films of the period, like *Agniporikha* and *Saptapadi* (starring Uttam Kumar). There is a clash between the two generations (father/son), which resolves by the film's end. These films represent the dilemma of forgoing the past and entering the new modern age, which is also the point of reference in Sudipta Kaviraj's book *The invention of Private Life* (2015).

Kaviraj understands 'modernity' through new forms of literature and social and political theories, which help him grasp the new modes of conduct in modern Bengal. According to Kaviraj, 'modernity' is not dubious but consists of different ethical choices that 'pre-modernists' do not accept. 'Pre-modernists' were 'religious' as opposed to the 'modernist rationalist' outlook who became a member of Brahmo Samaj like Sibnath Shastri. In his autobiography, Kaviraj analyzes that Sibnath tries to make his father understand that his way of life is neither stylish nor 'self-centered.'

Kaviraj points out that even though 'traditional values' were accepted and respected by the 'modernists,' it was never the other way around, as the 'pre-modernists' consider the 'modern man destructive.' The life of Sibnath Shastri stands as a symbol to many facing the same problems in their families (18-20). As in the autobiography of Sibnath Shastri, *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela* also depict the clash of perspectives between two generations in a family. The films depict the new generation adjusting to the old traditional values, which leads to the establishment of a happy *madhyabitta* (middle-class) family in *Deya Neya* and the triumph of

good over evil in the film *Bagh Bondi Khela* by the end and the reconciliation of some kind between the father-son.

The making of bhadralok masculinity and the succession from old to new patriarchy (father to son) depicts through the representation of gender relations in the family structures of the films. Hence it becomes imperative to understand the role of traditional and modern women in Bengal and their role in the family, specifically in the primary films of the dissertation; hence the next section will illustrate the position of women in society.

The Traditional Women

Men demonstrate masculinity through sex (gendered bodies), a naturally lacking characteristic in women. The issue of 'effeminate' men grew to irritate the Bengalis when colonizers started interfering in the issues which belonged as inner/ private to the natives. 'Colonial Masculinity' lays the foundation for the social and national movement. Dagmer Engel, quoted by Sinha, has pointed out two significant conflicts; due to the Age of Consent: Firstly, the question of women's protection, the colonizer had different sets of rules for 'preserving' the honor of their women than Indians. Secondly, the Indian men were furious at the women who supported the act in solidarity with the colonizers (Sinha 139). Scholar Partha Chatterjee argues that women's issue and their empowerment and protection was not rejected due to far more important political issues but shifted to the inner spaces of sovereignty and labeled as 'traditional.' Chatterjee emphasizes that the colonizers took upon themselves the duty of civilizing the nation after encountering primitive rituals performed on women. He gave the example of a nineteenth-century European traveler who documented the atrocious act inflicted by Indian men on women. Documents witnesses the lack of freedom given to women who are always dependent on the man as defined

as their ‘protector.’ The man is always right, and the woman is ‘greedy,’ ‘lustful,’ ‘evil,’ and ‘untrustworthy.’ She is supposed to ‘worship’ her husband, who can beat him if he finds it necessary. On his death, she has to perform *sati*, a ritual where she sits on her husband's burning body and dies with him (118-119).

The native Bengalis retaliated by dividing the ‘private/public’ sphere and locating the Indian women as belonging to the inner realm of feminine space, thus gaining masculine power by making decisions for the Indian women in the name of ‘protection’ and ‘empowerment.’

Chatterjee has written about the dichotomy of ‘materialism’ and ‘spiritualism,’ which divides the West from the East. According to the natives, the colonizers are masters of ‘science,’ ‘reasoning,’ and forming financial institutions and governance, while the natives are masters of traditional beliefs and practices. Reformers have debated accepting western ideals and holding on to what will benefit them; thus, the natives imitated the West in governance and protected the ‘spiritual’ spaces by incorporating selective western morality (119-120). Chatterjee next divides the ‘scientific/traditional’ dichotomy into inner/outer tropes. The scientific (outer) space liberates us to make changes in the ‘public,’ but it still needs to be more critical than traditional (inner) spaces. By dividing the spaces into ‘inner/ outer,’ social reformers could address social reform in Indian society (120). Chatterjee does not stop there but observes that the dichotomy of ‘inner/ outer’ further reduced to ‘*Ghar*’ (home) and ‘*Bahir*’ (world). The space outside the home is the world which is also the space where the West triumphed. The home is the space for women, and the world outside is for men. Thus, in this way, social reformers divided the social issues into gender issues and neglected women's issues as already superior in the home's spiritual (inner) space (120-121).

Scholar Dulali Nag termed the modern women represented in literature and cinema as ‘ambiguous’ and a product of the direct outcome of separating women issues and cornering the Indian women inside the household, according to Chatterjee. We see these ‘ambiguous’ women in *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela* (read below).

Modern Women

Masculine saviors of women and the nation have a firm root in Bengali literature, representing the state's politics. The films represent ‘educated women,’ as Dulali Nag mentions them as ‘ambivalent,’ portraying both masculine and feminine traits (780). Due to the nationalism project, education became crucial, and access to the public was open for women within limits (Nag 780).

Education has opened doors of public spaces to women, which was previously inaccessible to them, but this led to confusion between ‘nationalism’ and ‘modernity’ as they debated the responsibility of an ‘educated woman.’ Nag understands from Chatterjee that the ‘cultural’ sphere was the domain of feminine power and the ‘public’ sphere was the sphere of modernity, assigned to masculine power (780). The presence of strong ‘educated ambiguous women’ has been present in Bengali literature for a long time, as Nag mentions; one such example is Bimala from *Ghaire Baire* (Home and the World) by Rabindranath Tagore. The female protagonist Bimala represents the confusion between two ‘masculinities’ that left her destroyed and deciding between her role at home and outside. Nag mentions that it was a cultural order that represented Suchitra Sen as ‘high popular culture’ that she was associated with Bimala by Tagore and Aarati (another strong fictional woman) from Satyajit Ray's film *Mahanagar* (The Metropolis) (780).

Nationalist men constructed the concept of 'new women' by emphasizing the nation's political affairs and ignoring the emancipation of women and society. Partha Chatterjee, in his book, *Nation and its Fragments* (1993), writes that nationalist understands women's issues through the dichotomy of 'ghar/bahir,' 'spiritual/material,' and 'feminine/masculine,' used to access the daily routine of the 'modern' woman and her lifestyle both in 'private and public.' (as discussed above)

There is confusion about the place of the 'new woman' in society due to the constantly changing environment of middle-class families. Chatterjee writes about the 'new patriarchy' for the 'new modern women' who do not follow society's traditional beliefs and morals. Nationalists reworked and reinforced the patriarchy rationally from the irrational practices of the past (127).

In the same way, as the patriarchy has evolved over the years, the long tradition of literary figures inspired the portrayal of 'modern' women in these films. Both films (*Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*) represent characters who challenge and accept the norms of femininity. All the young women in the films fall under the banner of 'new women,' but they act and contribute to the notion of feminine/female dichotomy in different ways and extents. To understand the notion of 'modern women,' I have referred to historians who have charted women's history from India's colonial past. A study by Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (2008), examines the history of Indian women until 1975, when the United Nations declared it International Women's Year. She writes about three theoretical frames used in western countries to analyze the contribution of women in the past. They are as follows: firstly, reassessing already known documents and looking for women's roles in them. Secondly, by rewriting history from the perspective of genders, and thirdly, by giving the female perception privilege over the patriarchal notions interrupting women (1-2). Forbes, in this book, explores women's livelihoods by finding personal accounts and re-reading them. As she is studying written accounts, her work is around a

few upper-class/caste women, but as she refers to them in the process of becoming ‘elites.’ She writes about Anandabai Joshi (a doctor who married at nine) and Haimabati Sen (a widow who learns to write). Forbes also studies oral narrations like folk songs and stories to understand the vast population and diversity among the women of British India (4-6).

As films represent images from society, the women characters in both the films, *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*, also revolve around women's narratives, signified as ‘elites.’ Class factors play a significant role in assessing the heroines of both films and their relation with Uttam Kumar as the hero. In *Deya Neya*, the plot revolves around identity confusion where Prasanta Roy (Uttam Kumar), the son of a wealthy industrialist from an upper-middle-class *bhadra* family disguised as a driver, takes a job at Sucharita's house. While in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, Bhabesh plays a wealthy old man who lives in a mansion with many servants. However, he was an alcoholic father and abusive husband in a *madhyabitta* (middle-class) family before he became rich.

Dolon (Rajesh's friend) is a contrasting image of the film's shifting dynamics of class and wealth. She belonged to a well-reputed family and had shelter over her head as a child. However, in the film, she is depicted as an educated modern woman from a *nimna-madhyabitta* family living under poor conditions with her parents and fighting for her rightful inheritance, as their property was hoaxed from her father by Bhabesh. (More about the stories in chapter 3)

Both films are centered around marriage and couples, aside from the class factor. Every patriarchal society views marriage as a woman's fate. In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone De Beauvoir writes that marriage unions and women are indivisible. A woman today is always given status in society, looking at her ‘status in marriage’ (439). Women are generally associated with

the male, i.e., as mothers, wives, and daughters in societies. The portrayals of the heroines in these films are similar for the same reasons; still, some challenge their roles. One example from the primary film of the dissertation is that most women characters in *Deya Neya*, except the heroine, are unnamed as *Bouthan*, played by Lily Chakravarty, is not given an individual identity as she exists for others. Similarly, Sukanto's wife is also not given a name, thus an identity, and she remains insignificant in the film. (More about these characters in chapter 3)

Real-life women inspire several female characters in the films, but some challenge these roles while others accept them. In *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (2001), Tanika Sarkar writes about the image of the *Bhadramahila* and their role in the inner quarters. Sarkar studies the molding of the woman's image as a mother in the nineteenth century. Women's image has always dominated how the country is perceived—the *Bhadramahila* was fashioned to represent patriotic nationalism in Bengal. The idea of the country depends on the feminine values of the 'mother figure.' The Bengali 'baboo's are weak and 'effeminate' like the women (250-251). In "Modernity at Home: Autonomy and the New Woman in India," Abigail McGowan studies the circulated modern images of Indian women in the late colonial era; their role in keeping a household and caring for families and children (3). With the change in household responsibilities, women have more relaxing time, as *Bouthan* sits in front of a mirror, combing her hair. She has a servant to help her in the kitchen and a laundry man to wash clothes. McGowan brings attention back to the difficulty even in keeping a new modern home despite the representation of women having good times in art and advertisement (5). While *Bouthan* (Ashim's wife) represents the image of a 'modern woman,' we notice that the figure of the 'new woman has to embody certain ideals of moral conduct and supervise a considerable amount of work than before, as shown in the scene where she instructs the washerman about the laundry.

Deya Neya is a bildungsroman; it focuses on the story of Prasanta (Uttam Kumar) but is suggested as a 'women's film' by Gooptu. (More on this in chapter 2) Similarly, *Bagh Bondi Khela*, a 'revenge and criminal' genre as cited by Moinak Biswas and a 'domestic melodrama' as by Smita Banerjee (more on these in later chapters), also focuses on the role of Bhabesh (Uttam Kumar). However, the women in the films are more assertive and steal the limelight away from the protagonist until the end, where the sympathies still stay with Bhabesh (Uttam Kumar) as the director cannot simply crumble the star personality of the 'icon' that is Uttam Kumar. These films show the female protagonist as the modern woman, but they are, till the end, mere entertainers for the hero and audience.

Sarkar has written about five images of Goddess figures circulated in popular culture of the nineteenth century, which I have extensively discussed in chapter 3. The last image is of Goddess *Mahishashurmardini Durga*, who cleanses the world from evil forces (Sarkar 250-255); wives must take care of their husbands and, if necessary, take extreme measures to ensure they are on the right path. Bibha from *Bagh Bondi Khela* outed her husband, Bhabesh, to the police to bring him back to the moral path as *Mahishashurmardini Durga*. Sucharita from *Deya Neya* is a fan of singer Abhijeet Chowdhury in the film, whereas, Dolon and Bibha in *Bagh Bondi Khela* interrupt and guide the son Rajesh to keep him from becoming like his father, Bhabesh. Consequently, in *Deya Neya*, the woman emphasizes the protagonist's 'desirable' nature. Furthermore, in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, women serve as a means to an end.

As mentioned above, at the plot level, the females are present to enhance the 'desiring' quality of Uttam Kumar's persona in these films. In "Masculinity as Spectacle," Steve Neale writes that the male characters are also 'objects of the look' as the female. According to Laura Mulvey, the

audience shares the ‘voyeuristic gaze’; of the hero while the female is a subject of ‘sadistic experiences’ (12). On the other hand, Neale emphasizes that action in films leads to objectifying male bodies as they drive the action. Male figures also carry ‘voyeuristic pleasure’ for male/female spectators and characters (12). In *Deya Neya*, the audience gets the first glimpse of Uttam Kumar as he sings a song, and the camera looms close to his face, catching his every expression and hand movement as he swings his hands in the air while instructing the musician in the scene. In another film, *Nayak* (The Hero, 1966), directed by Satyajit Ray, Ray introduces Uttam Kumar in fragment shots; we see his body revealed before his face and, eventually, an up-close shot of his face wearing sunglasses. In these scenes, Uttam Kumar becomes the object of ‘desire’ for the audience, and as these films are focused on his characters, he remains the ‘look’ for the viewers watching his movies. The audience watches these films due to Uttam Kumar’s sole presence as the ‘romantic hero’ and the heroines depicted as ‘modern educated women.’

Conclusion

In this chapter, I charted the two categories of bhadralok masculinity commonly portrayed in Bengali literature and, over time, have persisted in Bengali films and played by Uttam Kumar. However, these two variations of masculinity fit only partially with the roles played by Uttam Kumar in both films. Though, as argued, there are no absolute depictions of masculinity, it varies and depends on different factors. The two protagonist roles played by actor Uttam Kumar in *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela* are also not absolute and have a degree of violence and softness. Thus, Prasanta in *Deya Neya* is not ‘effeminate’ nor ‘manly.’ As in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, Bhabesh is not just a manipulative bully; he has a weak and soft side that spring up at the climax in *Bagh Bondi Khela*. In the next chapter, I will discuss melodrama as a family genre and lay out

the elements of the melodramas of the primary films. Aside from that, I have located *Mahanayak* Uttam Kumar as an ‘icon’ whose charisma is prevalent even in the 21st century.

Chapter Two

Uttam Kumar in Melodramas

"Melodrama generates a field of narrative force that scatters families and individuals only to bring them back together again in a different cadenced public format."

(Vasudevan 48)

The above quote is from the essay "Melodramatic Public," by Ravi Vasudevan, which is about the family space in the melodramas of Indian Cinema. Vasudevan observes that a family's space and role have a public meaning in films, although it is a personal space. The family form gives a 'diegetic space' as a crucial narrational style in the 'popular configuration' (Vasudevan 48). Despite western melodrama's emphasis on family, the protagonist is at the center, and the family is in the background. However, in Asian films, the family structure is at the story's center (Dissanayake 4). *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*, the two primary films of this dissertation, also place the family at the center.

In *Deya Neya*, the protagonist Prasanta, decides, in the end, to give up his career in singing and return home and take care of the family business as per his father's wishes. However, the decision to do so had its reasons; it happened when his double life/identity was about to be revealed. (Story in chapter 3) Moreover, the choice to return to the family space under the patriarchal rule of his father is an example of Vasudevan's argument that 'the family somehow always comes together'(48). It is also evident in the scene at the end of the movie *Bagh Bondi Khela* when Bhabesh asks Bibha to take care of his first wife's son, Rajesh. In the film's climax scene, surrounded by cops, the audience witnesses Bhabesh repenting and praying that his son

does not turn out like him as he breathes his last. Here too, the family structure comes to some form of getting back together. The film ends here, as Bhabesh dies, but there is a certainty that Rajesh and Bibha, his stepmother, will be a family and continue to look after each other.

This chapter attempts to outline the rise of Uttam Kumar as a star who blurs the 'masculine/feminine' trope in his films through the gender roles and relations in the family spaces of the primary films. The blurring of his roles shows through the choice of genre: melodrama, which is about the family. The term 'family melodrama' was first used by Thomas Elsaesser in 1972, and it became the dominant genre in Hollywood from the 1970s onwards (Bitney 327). Melodrama is a genre for 'women' and has a co-relationship with 'emotion' as it is about the family. Scholars from the US and Europe have studied melodramas as a world of 'sentiments' and have associated them with women (Lughod 117).

In the previous chapter, I outlined the two kinds of masculinity, which belong to highly opposite categories that supposedly exist in Bengal and elsewhere. Furthermore, the chapter discusses Partha Chatterjee's idea of the 'new women,' which, as scholars have written, has survived from literature to exist in cinema.

'Family melodrama' and Uttam Kumar's feminine and masculine charm contribute to the popularity of the genre and the actor. This chapter will illustrate the elements of a melodramatic film with the help of scenes from the primary films of the dissertation. Before that, I begin with a short history of melodrama. In the last section, I situate Uttam Kumar, in Sayandeb Chowdhury's words, as the 'cultural icon' of Bengal.

Melodramas: ‘Holly’ to ‘Tolly’

According to Peter Brooks, melodrama has been popular since the French revolution. With time, the genre has shifted from stage to electronic mediums such as television and films. The stage melodrama disappeared suddenly with the advent of technology, and 'mass market cinema' took over. Lincoln J Carter, a producer, claimed that the crew members and technology used on stage have simply shifted to do melodrama films (Singer 12). There are ranges in stage melodrama such as '10-20-30' to melodramas films such as 'boom' as they depict realism on screen. Apart from the depiction of realism on screen, the sudden shift from stage to the screen is because film tickets are cheaper, films have no off-season as stage dramas, and are watched throughout the year (Singer 167-168).

Ben Singer gave five themes to recognize a play or a film as a melodrama. These five elements are a 'tragic plot, emotional outpouring, moral consciousness in the characters, modern narrative skills, and technological change' (4). A melodrama contains all or some of these elements; thus, it is a relatively flexible genre that can be adapted as the story requires.

As mentioned earlier, melodramas were for working-class citizens, but because they are emotional, they also appeal to women. Moreover, as most melodramas are the story of family, they are around 'domestic issues.' Hollywood melodrama depicts the emotional subjugation of female characters and represents societal values. Most mainstream films have a substantial male viewership; this depicts the irony as these are usually made for the female audience to watch. Even if melodrama depicts the domestic/inner quarters of the household, they still depict the man's world from his view/gaze. Quoting Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Singer writes that melodrama is subject to conversion hysteria; that is, the 'excess of emotions' contained in the melodramatic

narrative that is suppressed because it is 'incompatible' with the 'dominant patriarchal ideology.' As a result of the patriarchal ideology, melodrama suppresses emotions and expressions onscreen. These expressions and emotions are 'repressed,' and primarily 'oedipal' or 'homoerotic,' that surface through the setting of the scenes and through the music sequences in the films (Singer 39).

Women are submissive due to years of conditioning; hence, 'madness' can surface in a story because of her suppressed desire and feelings. This 'madness' depicts in the image of women in many films in both Hollywood and Bollywood. However, it is also a central theme in Tollywood produced *Harano Sur* (The Lost Tune), where music helps bring out past repressed desires in Uttam Kumar's character. In addition to *Harano Sur*, music also plays an essential role in the primary films of the dissertation, *Deya Neya*, and *Bagh Bondi Khela*. (More on this in chapter 3)

Bengali melodramas

The genre of melodramas reached India many decades back through the intervention of Western culture. Ravi Vasudevan traces the origin of Indian melodrama in the Parsi theatre of the mid-nineteenth century as the Parsi community climbed economically with the colonizers (35). Bengal has a long history of art and literature dating back to the arrival of the first silent films and, later, sound films with the development of technology and craft. Initially, theater houses like Tajmahal and Madan theater groups directed adaptations of Bankimchandra's *Bisha Briksha* (Poison Tree, 1922) and *Andhare Alo*. The Bengali bhadralok, like the Tagore family, embraced cinema as early as 1931 when they founded the Bengali film society, as noted by Sharmistha Gooptu (28-29).

Bengali melodramas began, as mentioned, with adaptations of stories from bhadralok writers like Tagore and Bankim and continued to shift in the post-partition era when the film industry turned to making films on the modern city and urban lifestyle. These were the ‘metropoliar melodrama’ that starred the young Uttam Kumar in the 1950s. Some others belong to ‘art house’ production (discussed below) like Ritwik Ghatak’s *Nagarik* and others like Sukumar’s Dasgupta’s *Ora Thake Odhare* (They Live That Side; 1953), which represent Kolkata as a ‘cinematic city,’ writes Chowdhury (2-3).

The two films in this dissertation are from two phases of Bengali melodrama. One is *Deya Neya* (1963), a romantic melodrama that focuses on the story of a young man in the modern city of Kolkata. Second is *Bagh Bondi Khela* (1975), a social drama about a fictional town’s aged and manipulative villain. In the next section, I have discussed the elements of melodrama used in the two primary films of *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*.

Elements of 'Family Melodramas'

Coincidences

The world of melodrama is small, where the characters would meet each other coincidentally but already have some form of former connection that they would discover during the film. Primarily seen as a genre for women, it is firmly attached to emotions. It is a world where one meets other people from the past and experiences emotion deeply. *Deya Neya* is also a film based on coincidences and former connections. Prasanta is a singer leading a life in disguise who gets an offer to visit and record songs in Kolkata, where he meets Sucharita on his first day in Kolkata as he is roaming and looking for a part-time job. Coincidentally, working under a new disguise as a driver/mechanic, Prasanta will realize the immense crush Sucharita has for singer Abhijeet that

is, Prasanta, whom no one has seen. A series of incidents would initially set the story flowing when Sucharita slowly starts to doubt Hridoyhoron's frequent leave from work. Her friend Suchi would also find Hridoyhoron (driver) a look-alike to the person she saw when Suchi and Sucharita went on their little adventure to find Abhijeet at his friend Ashim's place.

Another coincidence is that the display of affection between the hero and heroine arises from their mutual interest in music. Like, Prasanta, Sucharita is also a singer. Initially, Prasanta is drawn towards Sucharita when he watches her play the piano on his first day at work at Majumdar's residence as Hridoyhoron. Eventually, the more significant coincidence would be that their families are already acquaintances, and the possibility of marriage between the two (belonging to the same *madhyabitta* class) is acceptable, almost fated.

The plot of *Deya Neya* is on coincidences and former friendships. In that case, *Bagh Bondi Khela* is also a tiny universe where Rajesh would easily find the whereabouts of his childhood friend Dolon while having coffee at a cafe by chance. Similarly, he would be introduced to his prospective future wife, Sulekha, the daughter of the municipal head, by his childhood sweetheart Dolon before Bhabesh proposes to him about his marriage. Thus, we see that melodrama consists of coincidences and chance meetings between people who already know each other. Everything always settles down, and families come together at the end, as in *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*.

Negotiations

While the family stands as a vibrant hub in the melodramas, another element of melodrama is the negotiation tool that helps bring the family back together. *Deya Neya* illustrates the element of negotiation when the father and the son get together at the end and negotiate their beliefs and

expectations. Prasanta agrees to look after the family business, and the father agrees to let him continue his singing profession.

Deya Neya is about a *bhadra* family, whereas *Bagh Bondi Khela* is about a dysfunctional family where the villain relegates to violence to get his way in the story. Thus, there is an absence of negotiations in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, as the father and son could not negotiate and overcome their difference. Rajesh and Bibha had to file a complaint to the police to bring Bhabesh back on the right path. The family relies on the police to prevent Bhabesh from committing more crimes, although their efforts are futile since Bhabesh commits suicide and dies as an unredeemed villain. In these melodramas, negotiation invokes emotions like fear and anger, which are crucial to the films' plots.

Emotions in Melodramas

'Emotions and sentiments' are associated with femininity, and the lack is with masculinity, but in the universe of melodramas, 'emotions' are for all genders. In the Asian context, scholar Wimal Dissanayake observed that in melodrama, the role of 'suffering' is essential. It is not as crucial in the West, but the importance of human suffering, repentance, and existential crisis is different in Asian films of melodramas. In the film *Deya Neya*, 'suffering' becomes a contrasting tool to compare the lives led by Prasanta, the Singer from a middle-class family, and his friend Sukanto, the poet from a *nimna-madhyabitta* (lower middle class) family. Sukanto's tuberculosis illustrates the stark socio-economic differences between him and his friends, as he could not receive adequate medical care. It is a critique of society, which has led to an imbalance due to the unequal distribution of wealth.

While in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, the physical and psychological trauma that Kalyani 'suffers' has been a driving force to develop emotions of hatred and contempt in Rajesh for his father, Bhabesh. Eventually, the audience will watch Bhabesh suffer and dies as he commits suicide. So, 'suffering' is a significant emotional part of melodrama in these films.

Other emotions displayed in these films include anger, tension, and fear. In *Deya Neya*, the viewers would see the father, B.K Roy, as a patriarchal figure who throws his son out of his house, but that is at the surface level. Later we also see the same B.K Roy sending money to his son under his wife's name; he would also ask the cops to investigate his son's whereabouts. After learning about his son's residence in Kolkata, he did not spend another day and left immediately to get him back home. Throughout all this, he keeps a straight and hard face without showing concern and always pretends to be ignorant about his son's wellbeing. While in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, the father, Bhabesh, expresses his concern and fear that his son would turn out as corrupt and a conman as him and pleads to his second wife to take care of him at the very end.

The realm of the melodramas

Ben Singer writes that George Jean Nathan (1917), condemned the 'new melodrama' as an 'indoor' drama. Earlier, melodrama depicted adventure and violence outside in nature, but now it is shown in an 'inner' setting such as a library. Melodramas, as an old genre, are supposedly about the outdoors. Otherwise, Nathan considers them 'womanlike' (166). With this view, it becomes interesting to mention that the spaces and structures in these two primary melodramas of the dissertation usually unfold in the realm of the household.

Women are part of the 'inner/private' realm, and the stories of the new melodramas are about 'families,' and the plots are set in the inner quarter of a house. However, as melodrama is a

modern genre, the spaces in which most of the drama unleashes are ambiguous spaces similar to the representation of the ‘new women’ in these films who are termed as ‘ambivalent’ by Dulali Nag in her essay “Love in the time of nationalism: Bengali Popular films from the 1950s.” These ambiguous spaces are the balcony, staircase, and *verandah*, which link the ‘home to the world outside.’ As traditionally known, women are not allowed in the living room as it is an ‘ambiguous space.’ Although part of the house, the living room is a space that is reserved for guests and outside the reach of women.

As the characters are drawn from literature, as mentioned by Dulali Nag, it is intriguing to compare the spaces which connect the *andarmahal* (inner spaces) with the *bhaire* (outer realm). These are mostly the *verandah* (the inner circle), balcony, or staircase. In Tagore's *Ghaire Baire* (Home and The World) film adaptation, the director Satyajit Ray focuses on the scene in which the female protagonist Bimala, steps outside from the *andarmahal*, to meet Sandip for the first time. As she steps outside the *andarmahal*, the mention of the date manifests her initiation as a *memsahib*, a modern woman, no longer just a denizen of the inside.

The stretch of space between the balcony (earlier from where she has peeked to see Sandip give his speech on the Swadeshi Movement) and the living room is not long but appears for a prolonged time on the screen, in which Bimala walks calmly with her husband by her side. The viewers hear intense music in the background to attend to the significant moment, which adds to the drama. Almost twenty years later, in a reverse role in the film, *Deya Neya*, shows the intensity with which Uttam Kumar rushes to reach the living room through the staircase where Sucharita and her uncle are sitting. Unlike Bimala, Sucharita is comfortable in the presence of an outsider, Prasanta. She sits without any touch of hesitation, doubt, or fear among the two men in the room. The viewers would watch Sucharita comfortably perched in an armchair in her living

room, reading a magazine as she eavesdrops on Prasanta and her uncle Amritlal's conversation and interrupts them with her queries.

While in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, the big fight between Kalyani and Bhabesh occurs interestingly in the *verandah* (courtyard), an inner circle of the house, where the dancer Asmani (a third person) is present. The *verandah* is a space where outsiders are allowed as opposed to the bedroom (the personal space of the married couple) where Bhabesh takes Asmani. As a fight occurs between the couple, we see a new avatar of Kalyani, a fierce and unabashed woman standing for her and her son's rights after getting threatened by Bhabesh that she will go homeless.

Women in these films are shown outside their homes but are always accompanied by men. Sucharita is frequently seen outside, with Suchi, going to and returning from college and at the cassette studio. The viewers would notice she is accompanied by Hridoyhoron (Prasanta), the driver appointed by her uncle, and thus the presence of a male figure always hovers around. Ashim's house is represented as the realm of feminine bonds in the movie. Sucharita becomes friends with Ashim's wife, and this unfamiliar space becomes safe for her to confess her desire for Abhijeet. Thus, it becomes evident that, throughout the years, melodrama has changed with time and overcome resistance. It has turned more liberal in some aspects yet has retained elements of old melodrama, as it represents the hero in the outside world protecting the heroine.

The couples

Deya Neya and *Bagh Bondi Khela* belong to the 'family melodramas' genre as these films are set on patriarchal values yet are modern and urban. In any patriarchal society, the role of women in society depends on their reproductive capability. However, in both films, there are no children. In *Deya Neya*, there are three modern couples, but none are represented as parents and are not

concerned about being childless. However, in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, we see Rajesh as a child in the flashbacks he gets as an adult. As a bildungsroman, the narrative style helps the audience to gain information about Bhabesh's past relationships with his first wife and son.

Nevertheless, this was a narrational style used in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, and the story's main plot does not have any children or family planning. These films, *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela* emphasize the independent and modern nature of the couples. Similarly, in the 19th century, Babadralok writers like Rabindranath Tagore and Bankimchandra centered their novels on childless couples, such as *Ghaire Baire*, *Gora*, and *Anandamath*, which inspired these 20th-century films.

The Self

As the 'couple form' is essential in these films, so is the 'sense of self' in the portrayal of the men characters. Sudipta Kaviraj mentions the importance of 'privacy' as invariable attached to morality in the modern lifestyle (333). In *Deya Neya*, a bildungsroman (the narrative style helps in the growth of the self), Prasanta needs to move out of his house and fend for his desire before he falls for Sucharita and gets married. The film depicts Prasanta, retrospectively his decision to leave home to pursue his passion in a scene (as captured in the camera) before selling his car and traveling to Kolkata to pursue his career as a singer. In a subsequent scene, he finds himself hopeless and rethinking his decision after hearing about his mother's ill health and his father's decision to involve the police to bring him home from his house servant. Prasanta contemplates his moral duty toward himself in the first scene and his moral duty toward his parents in the second.

While in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, the 'sense of the self' is realized by Rajesh twice. Once when Dolon questions his intentions for her (we see the camera reflecting his face long after Dolon leaves the scene) and second, in the scene where he meets a woman from the brothel who questions Bhabesh's humanity and as he finally realizes his father's true self. The sense of moral duties as a free man is, however, only realized by Bhabesh (Uttam Kumar) in the climax scene. Thus, the film allows the son to redeem and be responsible for his choices; however, it does not show the same mercy to the father.

Women on the Screen

As discussed above, *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela* give space for men to develop their moral identities. However, women are associated with families, and their growth intermingles with the well-being of all the family members. As mentioned before, the genre of melodrama is for women, and it deals with families, as according to the convention, women associate with families and the private; hence, critics have pointed out that Uttam Kumar's films are for the female audience, but they are still patriarchal. With the rise of Uttam-Suchitra films, Gooptu observed the trend of 'female films' centered around female protagonists. However, most filmgoers watched it for the hero Uttam Kumar rather than its story, which scholars have said, is sometimes the 'critique of patriarchy or a woman's life.' Though the question remains if portraying a woman's life on screen makes it a feminist film. Because mainly by the end of such films, the women, after depicting radical views, submit to 'conventionally' accepted ideas of society.

Scholar Laura Mulvey observes that the female character is for the 'pleasure of the male and the spectators of the films,' she is passive, and her sexuality is for the 'gaze' of the male protagonist

(63-64). The film depicts the female character as a rebel, but as the film proceeds, her appeal fades. She becomes the 'object of desire' only for the hero, or she becomes 'obedient' as tamed by the hero or other characters of the film. As in *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*, the women are the 'view' who submit to the patriarchal setup or disappear before the climax after challenging it. An example is when Ashim's wife tells Sucharita that women should not stay angry for too long because she feels betrayed and fooled by Prasanta in the end before she gives up too quickly to agree to the marriage proposal. She appeared to be waiting for someone to remind her to behave 'conventionally' in such situations.

At the end of *Deya Neya*, Sucharita becomes passive and agrees to marry Prasanta. It is rather peculiar that even while agreeing to the marriage, she never utters a word; instead, she turns around smiling shyly and exits the room, which is considered her accepting the marriage proposal. However, Dolon disappears before the climax scene in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, as she has served her purpose as the 'view' and was turning an obstacle between the father-son relationship as she questions Rajesh's intentions on returning her ancestral property. (Story in chapter 3)

Mulvey locates two forms of 'gaze' in films for the 'spectators.' One is 'scopophilia,' the desire to be 'seen,' and the second is the 'narcissistic' aspect, in which the spectator sees him/her/them as they see on the screen (61). In many ways, the private, personal of the family remains to be watched by outsiders (filmgoers), transgressing the 'public/private dichotomy of the bhadralok society which Partha Chatterjee writes about in *Nations and its Fragments*. The work of an actor is then to blur the difference between the private/public as the camera shows them in personal spaces of the house. Similarly, in *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*, the actors discuss personal matters while the audience watches, blurring the line between private and public life.

In the next section, I will situate *mahanayak* Uttam Kumar among the melodramas of his time and discuss him as the 'cultural icon' in Bengal. As melodramas are on 'families' and have relevance in 'sentiments' and 'emotions' which are part of women's genres, Uttam Kumar takes the 'back seat' in 1950-1960s films, writes Gooptu. It is interesting to note that still, people watch his films not as feminist or women's films but as Uttam's. He remains the eye candy, the center of attraction. Gooptu mentions that people generally would refer to these films as Uttam's films even if he has a 'passive role,' as in most films, actress Suchitra Sen leads the story as a rich, educated woman from the city. Whereas, as we have seen in chapter 1, the female characters are primarily mere entertainers and third-wheelers who are part of the film to let the character of Uttam Kumar shine and eventually submit to the patriarchal figure as the film ends, primarily through marriage.

Preserving the Past

Melodrama is a modern genre that adapts to cultural, political, and social changes according to the time (Chowdhury 4). Bengali films wanted to keep the 'bhadralok culture' alive and identify with the Bengali past. *Deya Neya* represents the bhadralok culture, which the Bengalis wanted to preserve over the years. The arranged marriage, the traditional values, and familial bonds (discussed in chapter 3) are part of the plot where Prasanta (Uttam Kumar) is juggling between the old values of his father and his modern desires. *Bagh Bondi Khela* shows Uttam Kumar as an 'aged man' who represent the changing bhadralok culture but fits in with old familial bonds as the film ends.

In an article, film critics like Chidananda Dasgupta write that Hindi cinema has a different culture and gets inspiration from Bengali cinema. An example would be the Hindi adaptation of

Deya Neya as *Anurodh* (1977). While regional cinema inspired Hindi cinema, the regional industry sought to find affinity to their past, identity, and memory in their work (Chowdhury 4-5). Uttam Kumar was present when Bengali cinema was changing, which benefited both the actor and the industry. He was a versatile actor who could fit any role, but scholar Sayandeb Chowdhury called him the 'bhadralok star.' He was also addressed as a 'guru' (master) by the working-class audiences who went to watch him on the big screen. Uttam Kumar became the 'matinee hero' overnight after the release of *Agnipariksha* in 1954. Chowdhury has observed that his position as a talented young man in Bengal is due to 'partition.' He became famous as a performer, entertainer, and romantic actor, as the audience (25) watched his films for entertainment and to escape reality. By portraying modern urban professionals on the screen, he represents change and modernity. Throughout his career, Uttam Kumar has shown the ability to act in many different roles. His portrayal of any role has never been linear, which has led to him becoming an icon (26-28). Another significant reason apart from his talent would be the quotient of 'luck' that he was present at a time when the 'studio era' was shifting to the 'star era,' as Chowdhury elucidated the shifts in filmmaking.

However, as Gooptu writes, Uttam Kumar's Bengali films of 1950-1960 are known as the 'golden period' of Bengali cinema. The films are in their 'self-images' as Bengalis that inspire 'good feeling' and 'bengaliness' among the audience. Uttam and Suchitra become the symbol of the industry (Gooptu 99). Gooptu cited Kirinmoy Raha that the difference between Bombay and Bengali film industries is that the former focuses on star-packed action, song, and dance performances, and the latter on 'Good Script' (100-101). This idea of 'bengaliness' takes root in two kinds of film: Art and Commercial productions.

Art and Commercial Productions

In the wake of partition and innumerable migrants crossing borders, there was a need for change. By the middle of 1930, Bengali folks were favoring left politics. Leftists organized the Indian People's Theater organization, IPTA (1943), as the symbol of art and social awareness in the changing society. The new kinds of films made on the 'social and political awareness' in Bengal are called the 'art house' films. Such productions resulted from the 'rise of the film society, western ideals, and the interest of realist critiques of literature and art.' Nema Ghosh and Ritwick Ghatak, members of IPTA, are two directors who directed art films. They represented the present state of desolation, destruction, changing meanings of citizenship, and urban lifestyle through their films. A film like *Nagarik* (The citizen; 1977), directed by Ghatak, portrays the ideal citizens facing poverty and unemployment and still trying their best to hold on to their traditional *bhadralok* culture (Chowdhury 103-104). Satyajit Ray was the successor of Art film productions after Ghosh and Ghatak. Ray was crucial to the rise of 'art house' production in the Bengali Industry as he was interested in the idea of 'visual' in films.

Scholar Subhajit Chatterjee writes about two kinds of film production in Bengal. One was the 'modern realism' of Ray (for example, *Pather Panchali*⁸, 1955), and the second was a 'new popular romance' (*Pronoydharmi Chobi*) starring Uttam Kumar with Suchitra Sen, trending after the 40s (Mukherjee and Bakshi 2). They (Ray and Uttam) have together developed two different schools of thought in Bengali cinema, which have 'crossed paths' in two of Ray's films with Uttam Kumar: *Nayak*⁹ (1966) and *Chiriyakahana* (1967) (Chowdhury 23).

⁸ Debut film of Satyajit Ray, went on to be awarded the oscar.

⁹ *Nayak* was considered a semi-autobiographical work about Uttam Kumar's career.

Contemporaries of Uttam Kumar would remake, adapt, and get inspired by the work of such prodigious authors as Rabindranath Tagore, Bankimchandra, and Satyajit Ray to stay connected to the past. The involvement of talented actors and directors, including writers like Tagore, initiated the idea of 'bengaliness' in cinema.

There are writers, directors, cinematographers, and actors who had a foot in both schools of thought, 'Art and Popular cinemas,' like Uttam Kumar, Soumitra Chatterjee, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, Primendra Mitra, Madhabi Mukherjee, Chhabi Biswas and there was always Tagore to back up the two schools of thought which parted sharply in the 1950s (Chowdhury 134-135).

Besides the cast and his 'good stories' based on Bengali literature, Uttam Kumar's movies were blockbusters, increasing his popularity among his fans. In Mulvey's observation, the audience is fascinated by seeing themselves on screen not as their self-portraits but as better and more successful versions who would solve the problem and win over the heroine. As discussed above, the realm of the household symbolizing the personal and private is on display in a film; when actors are shown in personal spaces, discussing private matters, the veil between the audience and the screen drops. Mulvey discusses the 'narcissistic' side that 'spectators' display by identifying with the male protagonists on screen. In his movies, Uttam Kumar portrayed young people who were becoming 'modern' and exhibiting the adaptation of new ways of life on screen, which was helpful for his viewers who were watching the changes in lifestyles or livelihoods due to western influences.

While the spectators' opinion varies, men are likely to outnumber women who watch movies on the big screen, sitting in dark jet rooms with strangers. Uttam Kumar was famous in the 1950s to

1960s and even later when he experimented with his 'old body' and tried coming out of his persona as a 'romantic charmer.' However, his 'stardom' and 'fandom' persist and continue even in recent years as women watched Uttam Kumar films to identify him as their 'lover,' writes Chowdhury. To understand the height of his popularity, Chowdhury looks into the work of the actor's contemporaries, such as Chabbi Biswas (1900-1962) and Soumitra Chatterjee. (1935-2020), who reached unprecedented heights in the twentieth century along with Uttam Kumar (Chowdhury 94-95). Hence, the *mahanayak* was not the only actor of his time, but he may have been more popular. Director Satyajit Ray favored Uttam Kumar over others due to Uttam's prodigious box office success and acting style, even Soumitra Chatterjee, with whom he did more films (Chowdhury 98-99).

In all of this, it remains elusive; what made Uttam Kumar the *mahanayak* in Bengal, and how is he still the 'cultural icon' for Bengalis? According to Chowdhury, *Mahanayak's* success resulted from the shift in cinema from the 'studio era to the star era' after partition, as well as luck that favored him, making him a star with a charisma that is still relevant today. The following section situates the image of Uttam Kumar in the present time as a preserver of the past.

Uttam Kumar Now

Uttam Kumar is the *mahanayak* in Bengal, as his image has been sketched as Bengal's 'icon' since he died in 1980. He has been influential in keeping the idea of 'bengaliness' alive for present generations of Bengalis in West Bengal and outside (*Prabasi Bangali*) along with poet Rabindranath Tagore and writer and director Satyajit Ray. This influence is evident through scholar Sayandeb Chowdhury's recent 2021 academic work *Uttam Kumar: A life in cinema*.

Alongside the scholarly works, the continuous reference and acknowledgment that Uttam Kumar still receives in Bengali films and soap operas situate the actor as an 'icon.' In a recent film, *Bela Seshe* ('At the End of the Day;' 2015), ironically starring Soumitra Chatterjee, refers to 'cinema within cinema reference' to *Deya Neya* and the fan following of Uttam Kumar.

The actor image has turned into a 'cultural symbol' of romance, good times, and bhadralok past in other contemporary films as well, like *Praktan* ('Former' or 'Ex'; 2016), where actor Prosenjit Chatterjee and Rituparna Sengupta are the embodiment of the 'star couple': Uttam-Sucharita. This continued reference to the 'star couple' is not limited to Bengali films but continues into Bengali soap operas. A telly serial starring actor Prosenjit Chatterjee reveals in an interview that his role in *Mahanayak* comes close to Uttam Kumar and his father, Biswajit Chatterjee. Interestingly, the character played by Prosenjit Chatterjee in the telly was 'Arun,' which was also the birth name of Uttam Kumar. So, these continued references, and acknowledgments of his work in Bengal today, have made the actor synonymous with the Bengali film industry. It is evident from these examples; that Bengalis are still fascinated by *mahanayak* Uttam Kumar.

A separate study can be conducted on Uttam Kumar as a 'cultural icon' for Bengalis globally; however, I have read his stardom as a backdrop to understand the two bhadralok masculinities he has represented throughout his career, which changed over time.

Conclusion

The chapter draws the element of melodrama as a 'family genre' usually produced solely for female audiences who are 'emotional beings,' but in the melodramatic film, it is not always the woman who is passionate; the male characters are equally compassionate. The melodrama plot is about the 'domestic issues' by representing chance discoveries, old bonds, coincidences,

negotiations, and emotions between the film characters. The star figure of Uttam Kumar hangs on the dichotomy of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' and does not fit either. It is a style of the time, as mentioned, it was not new to be 'gender fluid' in cinemas, which helped the rise of melodrama from the 'studio era' to the 'star era' and made the actor famous. However, surprisingly, the actor's fandom has persisted; he is worshiped even today as an 'icon' who held the past 'bhadralok cultures,' together which the Bengalis want to keep alive, and scholars term it as 'bengaliness.' In the next chapter, I analyze the stories of the two primary films, *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*, and study the gender roles portrayed in the films through the blurring dichotomy of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' and compare the modern women and their roles in the films.

Chapter Three

Friendship, Romance, and Fathers in *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*

In the previous chapter, I discussed melodrama and its elements, as well as *Mahanayak* Uttam Kumar's status as an 'icon' of Bengali culture. Scholars Sayandeb Chowdhury and Smita Banerjee have studied the role and contribution of Uttam Kumar in becoming the 'one man force' that helped the Bengali film industry to survive in the 1960s-1970s (Banerjee 52). Initially, he did romantic melodramas like *Deya Neya*. His later films, however, were not well received at the box office because the actor played an 'aged father' or 'elder brother' instead of a romantic actor. This chapter outlines the two bhadralok masculinity represented in Uttam Kumar's films, as he represents both masculinities and only partially conforms to one another. One is the romantic young actor, as he played in his earlier career and which gave Uttam Kumar and his contemporary actress Suchitra Sen the most fame in Bengal. Second is the bhadralok patriarch figure he played in the 1970s, which falls under the 'revenge and criminal films' according to Moinak Biswas (126-127). Smita Banerjee has discussed such 1970s films like *Bagh Bondi Khela*, *Hotel Snow Fox*, *Ekahnar Pinjar*, *Jadu Bangsha*, and *Nagar Darpane* as 'domestic melodrama' under the criteria of American melodramas. One of the styles in American melodramas is to present the father and brother figure as facing anxiety issues. The 'domestic melodramas' in the US have the qualities of 'male weepies,' representing the actor as a rebel needing emotional support. In such films, characters experience social and political traumas (Banerjee 54).

Reviews (Melodramas and Uttam Kumar)

Deya Neya and *Bagh Bondi Khela* have a thirteen-year gap between them. During this time, there were significant changes in the Bengali film industry and the star figure of Uttam Kumar. The industry had also developed further using technological equipment and devices and introduced new genres like the ‘criminal hero and revenge drama’ in the 1970s (Biswas 126-127). A step away from romantic roles usually played by Uttam Kumar, like in *Deya Neya*, he ‘experimented’ with his role in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, writes scholar Smita Banerjee, as he played the ‘ineffectual dada’ in the 1970s (68). Banerjee studies the lesser-known characters that Uttam Kumar played during the 1960s -70s. Kumar is not the main protagonist but refers to as a ‘character actor’ playing the *dada*, the older brother, or the father, as in *Bagh Bondi Khela* (52-53). The story of *Bagh Bondi Khela* is about Bhabesh, the patriarch and not the son. Hence, he is not the ‘character actor’ but the protagonist, even if he looks aged. He is the central character whom everyone has reasons to hate, and some even want him to repent and turn into a ‘good man’ (More about the story below).

Banerjee has described ‘domestic melodrama’ by borrowing from Rodowick, who writes-

"The domestic melodrama is attentive only to problems which concern the family's internal security and economy and therefore consider its authority to be restricted to issues of private power and patriarchal right." (54).

So, the film depicts the tension and turbulence in family structures and relations representing the more significant social period of the 1960s-1970s (Banerjee 53-54). Banerjee writes that Uttam Kumar plays the father or husband facing misery like a ‘domestic melodrama’ in US films. A few examples of such ‘domestic melodrama’ in Bengal are *Sesh Anka* (‘The Final Act,’ 1963), *Jotugriho* (‘The House of Wax,’ 1964), *Jibon Jigyasa* (‘The Atoner,’ 1971), *Bikele Bhorer Phul*

(‘Love in Autumn,’ 1974), *Bagh Bondi Khela* (‘The Hunting Game,’ 1975), *Hotel Snow Fox* (1976).

The characters of Uttam Kumar depict uneasiness, the generational gap in understanding the changes, and youngsters facing problems due to Bengal's ‘socio-political’ environment. Such films also borrow style from the ‘male weepies,’ a type of film under ‘family melodramas’ that includes a man who is a rebel, opposing society, and mentally perturbed, also called a ‘male tear-jerker.’ Uttam plays the ‘male tear-jerker’ in *Ekhane Pinjar* (‘The Prisonhouse,’ 1971), *Jadu Bangsho* (‘The Parricide,’ 1974), and *Nagar Darpane* (‘In the Mirror of the City,’ 1975) (54). Even then, there are exceptions, like in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, where Uttam Kumar is not a rebel but a dishonest troublemaker trapped by the police at the end of the film, as referred to in the title, which translates as ‘The Hunting Game.’

The period of 1960-the 1970s was affected by wars (1962, 1965, 1971), ‘famines, crop failures, the rise of Marxist Naxals, and the ideological difference between Communists and Congress’ (Banerjee 56-57). Banerjee writes about the dichotomy between the *bhadralok* and the *changras* (middle-class, educated but unemployed folks) who joined the Naxal movements against the political party in power. These sets of people disrespect the elders and the ‘old bhadralok culture.’ Banerjee quotes from Gooptu that earlier, the films in Bengal depicted ‘bengaliness’ to entertain a specific section. However, directors like Tapan Sinha's *Apan Jan* (1968) and Ashutosh Bandopadhyay's *Teen Bhuvoner Paare* (‘Beyond the three worlds,’ 1969) starred Soumitra Chatterjee in the role of a *mastaan* (unemployed fellow). Banerjee observes that the change from romance to stories about angry, lonesome, jobless men forming ‘*mastaan*’ teams who make a living by working in illegal trades significantly differs from the Hindi films’ ‘*tapori*’ characters.

She also writes that Amitabh Bachchan's acting style differed from Uttam Kumar and Soumitra Chatterjee, who did not act as the 'angry young man.' Later heroes such as Prosenjit (1962-), Ranjit Mukherjee (1944-) Chiranjeev (1955-) played the role of 'working-class saviors' in the 1980s (56-58), representing a different range of masculinity on screen.

"A postcolonial iconicity: Rereading Uttam Kumar's Cinema as Metropolar Melodrama" by Sayandeep Chowdhury discusses the city space and the rise of Uttam Kumar. Films by Indian People's Theater Association (IPTA) members like Nemai Ghosh and Ritwik Ghatak gave meaning to the city, which had suffered after Partition. They came up with melodramas like *Nagarik* and others like Sukumar's Dasgupta's *Ora Thake Odhare* (They Live on That Side, 1953) which starred Uttam Kumar in one of the roles. Chowdhury writes that such films represent Kolkata as a 'cinematic city' (2-3). In his book *Uttam Kumar: A Life in Cinema*, Chowdhury writes that Uttam Kumar earned fame by starring in romantic films, but despite that, he continued acting in experimental roles in 'atypical' movies, which were not as successful as romantic films. The romantic melodramas— which were also 'metropolis melodrama'— were watched and appreciated by the audience. So, the films of 1950-1960, some of which are *Sharey Chatterjee*, *Ora Thake Odhare*, *Shaheb Biwi Gulam*, *Kanna*, *Chowringhee*, are labeled as 'metropolar¹⁰melodramatic movies' by Chowdhury (9-10). Uttam Kumar established the romantic melodrama form in the 1950s for commercial consumption. However, his selection style at the end of the 1960s led to the decline of the form, as he consciously acted in films that were not romantic (10). Chowdhury writes that the 'metropolar' movies were a break, and so

¹⁰Chowdhury borrows "metropolar" from Soja's 'Metropolarity' to indicate the political economy of the state. Chowdhury borrowed the term for Kolkata as it grew to be Bengal's cultural hub after Partition. Kolkata was a cultural and economic realm in colonial and postcolonial times.

were ‘crossover’ films like *Bagh Bondi Khela* (1975). The 'crossover' genre included films with social and political awareness, gray characters, and criticisms of society (11).

In all the discussion of the above scholars, it becomes evident that be it in ‘metropolis melodrama’ or experimental ‘crossover films,’ Bengali cinema tried hard to keep their identity as belonging to bhadralok families alive. *Deya Neya* is primarily the story of a bhadralok nuclear family residing outside Kolkata. (More about the story below) At the same time, *Bagh Bondi Khela* depicts the rampant corruption in a family representing the socio-political condition of Bengal. The rest of the chapter discusses the representation of the blurring of bhadralok masculinity by closely reading the gender roles portrayed in the films. The chapter charts the difference and shifts in Uttam Kumar's screen presence by analyzing the narratives of the films and the overall plot. The chapter divides into two sections: in the first, I briefly outline the stories of the two primary films, followed by a comparison of the films. Next, this chapter will demonstrate the change in the depiction of masculinity by actor Uttam Kumar by studying the different gender relations and the spaces in which heterosexual couples appear. His acting with other contemporary actors and actresses in both *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela* is also analyzed to demonstrate the representation of masculinity and femininity in the films.

The Story: *Deya Neya*

Deya Neya (A Romantic Exchange, 1963), a romantic comedy directed by Sunil Bandyopadhyay¹¹, features Uttam Kumar opposite Tanuja. Prasanta (Uttam Kumar) is the son of a wealthy industrialist in Lucknow, B.K Roy (Kamal Mitra), and Sucharita (Tanuja) is the niece of Amrita Lal Majumdar (Pahari Sanyal) of Kolkata. The story unfolds when Prasanta gets an

¹¹ Sunil Bandhopadhyay has worked with Uttam Kumar again in *Rajkanya* (Princess 1965, story by Ritwik Ghatak) and *Antony Firingee* (1967).

offer to sing at Kolkata's Gramophone studio and plans to leave his home quietly when he gets caught by his father, who is against his singing. He throws him out of his house and asks him to survive independently. Prasanta goes to Kolkata and stays with a college friend Ashim (Tarun Kumar), and his wife, referred to as 'Bouthan' or 'elder sister-in-law' (Lily Chakravorty). Before leaving Lucknow, Prasanta visits his other college friend Sukanto (Premangshu Bose), who is suffering from tuberculosis and gives some money to his wife. Sukanto is a poet and the lyricist for all the songs which Prasanta sings in the film, and he is not financially well-off as Prasanta. Eventually, Prasanta gets employment as a mechanic/driver at Sucharita's house, and the plot becomes more complicated as Prasanta takes on other personalities: he is already Abhijit Chowdhury (the pseudonym under which he sings). Also, he becomes Hridoyhoron, the driver/mechanic Sucharita's uncle hires. Sucharita is a die-hard fan of Abhijeet Chowdhury and, like Abhijeet's other fans, has never seen him. The audience is well aware of the two identities which Prasanta adopts in Kolkata, and the pleasure of the film is in watching him juggle these different personalities. Prasanta's disguises are discovered by B.K Roy (Prasanta's father), Sucharita, and her uncle in the climax, after which B.K Roy approves his son's profession as a singer if he also looks after the family business. Sucharita forgives his deception, and Prasanta's mother approves of Sucharita as her daughter-in-law, thus leading to a happy ending.

Bagh Bondi Khela

Bagh Bondi Khela (The Hunting Game, 1975) is a crossover film directed by Pijush Bose.¹² This film is based on Prafulla Roy's novel. The cast consists of Bhabesh Banerjee (Uttam Kumar), Bibha (Supriya), and Rajesh (Partho Mukherjee). The story is set in the fictional town of Ranipur

¹² Bose and Uttam Kumar worked together on crossover films like *Sabyasachi* (1977), an adaptation of Saratchandra Chatterjee's *Pather Dabi* (1926), *The Right Way or Demands of the Road*, *Sanyasi Raja* (1975) and *Bikele Bhorer Phul* (1974, Morning flower in the Evening), *Kalankini Kankabati* (1981, Ill-fated Kankabati), *Dui Prithibi* (1980, Two Worlds)

and unfolds when Rajesh visits his father, Bhabesh, a greedy, cunning, and cruel businessman. He appears to have done a lot for Ranipur as a philanthropist, but underneath that disguise, he engages in human trafficking, smuggling, and forging documents. He manipulates his son and his second wife (Bibha) to earn his name in politics for fame and power. Bibha and Rajesh eventually get together to bring Bhabesh on the right path by informing the police about his illegal trades. He refuses to repent and commits suicide as the police catch hold of him in the last scene.

In *Bagh Bondi Khela*, there are three women from two generations: Rajesh's mother, Kalyani, presented through his flashbacks; Bibha, Bhabesh's second wife, and Dolon Basu, Rajesh's childhood friend, who is an educated, modern-day opinionated woman, part of the student union at her college. She holds a grudge against Bhabesh as he deceives and bullies her father into giving away their house after he deliberately mixed up the amount of loan taken by her father. In the rest of the chapter, I discuss the plot of these films in light of the gender roles played by Uttam Kumar.

Plot: Comparison: (Deceptions and Marriages)

The element of deception is crucial in both *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*. However, it is playful in one and more severe in the second. The story in *Deya Neya* develops with a plot twist, where the hero intentionally plays more than one character, as in Shakespeare's comedies. The audience enjoys the disguise as they know that Prasanta is both Abhijit Chowdhury (the singer) and Hridoyhoron (the servant). We see Sucharita wondering why Horon takes frequent holidays. She does not take any drastic steps against him, except when she refuses to grant his request for leave one day, which is then eventually granted by her uncle. Hridoyhoron tells them that his son

has broken his arm and has to be rushed to the hospital, but as the audience knows, he has a live performance at a radio station. A performance about which Sucharita is also excited and waiting in anticipation. Another scene where he almost gets caught is when Suchi and Sucharita visit Ashim's place, and Suchi notices Hridoyhoron. However, on telling Sucharita about her suspicion, Sucharita concludes that Suchi has a crush on her driver.

The concept of deception is utilized comically in *Deya Neya*. In one of the comical scenes, Sucharita and her uncle decide to keep a pet name for Hridoyhoron/Prasanta as his name is too long. Prasanta teases Sucharita and asks her to call him Hridoy, which means heart. Finally, they decide to call him Horon. The name 'Horon' means to steal/kidnap. The audience would have enjoyed the pun in the name as Uttam Kumar had huge female fandom, and by keeping the character's name as Hridoyhoron, it also indicated Uttam Kumar's stardom as he has many fans. Chowdhury recollected episodes of Uttam Kumar's frenzy and peculiar fan, which consisted of blood-soaked letters, late nights calls, and women fans who renounced family to stay with him and other crazy tales. Chowdhury also writes that as a 'heterosexual star,' he had both women and men fans. He writes that for the women, the *Mahanayak* is a person who is an 'icon' of love and romance, whom everyone wants to possess despite knowing that it is impossible (50-52).

The story in *Deya Neya* gets complicated when Prasanta refuses to go home after his servant comes to visit Prasanta in Kolkata. He tells him that his mother is sick and asks him to return, but Prasanta clings to his male ego and refuses to go. Before leaving for Kolkata, Prasanta's mother asked the servant to ask him, '*Ami ki tor keyo na?*' (Am I nothing to you?) (1:09:34). Prasanta did not deem it fit to return as this would signify his 'defeat'. His words to the servant were: "*Baari te gele ami haare jabo.*" (If I go back home, it will be my defeat) (1:19:12). The male ego and hesitation between Prasanta and his father signify the strain between the two, which hinges

on the struggle between 'old' and 'new' values. The film shows the different masculinities portrayed by the opposing view of the son and his father. The father holds power in the orthodox patriarchal households, outside which Prasanta finds himself winning and feeling free. Eventually, Prasanta's father, who is equally worried as his mother but pretends otherwise, takes the help of the police to bring his son back home. The audience will see the soft and caring, worried side of B.K Roy. He gives some money to his servant to give his son instructions to say that it is from his mother, while the mother would also give some money to the servant with the instruction that Prasanta must know that the money is from his father. We see the worried parents at the margin of the main narrative until B.K Roy decides to get involved and visit Kolkata on his own. The confusion multiplies as the police look for Prasanta, and Amrita Lal Majumdar (Sucharita's uncle) also complains at the police station regarding the whereabouts of his servant, who has gone missing without taking his salary. The radio news also announces that Hridoyhoron is missing.

The police investigate and find Abhijeet and the appearance of Prasanta alike and bring B.K Roy to Abhijeet's live performance. There the orthodox father gets overwhelmed and emotional upon finding his son and hearing him sing. Eventually, the police arrest Prasanta and take him to Amrita Lal Majumdar's residence, where in the last scene, everything falls into place, and the story ends. Prasanta is surprised to discover that Amrita Lal Majumdar and his father are childhood friends. Ashim's wife persuades both families to get Prasanta-Sucharita married. The film ends as a Shakespearean romantic comedy where everything gets resolved with marriage at the end.

In *Bagh Bondi Khela*, the story unfolds in two ways; we see Bhabesh's story in the past and the present. As Smita Banerjee says, the 'old body' of the 'star' is evident through Rajesh's

flashback and the present. The audience also notices the presence of Bibha as a voyeur from the first scene, as she spies on the father-son duo unnoticed by them. The audience does not know about the mysterious woman's identity. Her identity unfolds when Rajesh becomes aware of her presence, while Bhabesh never acknowledges her true identity until later. The audience knows only half of the truth and discovers the identity of Bibha alongside Rajesh, who does not know who Bibha is and why she is so involved in their family affairs. Here the role of deception is utilized to reveal the dark character of the hero, Uttam Kumar. As the story progresses, the audience and his son slowly uncover the 'real' Bhabesh. As we continue watching the film, we will remember the flashback where Kalyani, Bhabesh's first wife, cries out that she would like to see how low he can descend before she dies. We see Bhabesh, who appears inhuman and dangerous when he threatens a trafficked woman (Radha) that she will be injected with a drug and taken by force. The camera looms close to the face of the man with an injection in his hand, to whom Bhabesh gave instructions to inject the scared and protesting Radha with the syringe.

Interestingly, Bhabesh does not inject the drugs into Radha himself, as the audience might not have appreciated this action by their romantic 'matinee star.' Nevertheless, it added to his character's inhuman trait as a bully; Bhabesh was not only cunning but manipulative as he hid behind goons to get his way.

Marriage is crucial in both films. In *Deya Neya*, the trope of marriage is to reach a happy ending after the confusion resolves. The married couple, Ashim and *bouthan* and Sukanto Bose and his wife, are powerful portrayals of happy marriages for Prasanta and Sucharita. While in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, Bhabesh is married twice. The film depicts a marriage in a different light. We see Kalyani suffering domestic violence of both emotional and physical kind, which she endures for her son and ultimately dies. Rajesh recalls this throughout the film. Later, the audience would see

Bhabesh maneuver to win the local elections by pretending to give all his property to Rajesh but only temporarily. Rajesh did not know that he would lose everything after the election. This maneuver is an old trick that Babesh has pulled on his second wife, Bibha, but was unsuccessful. She was thrown out of the house mercilessly after Bhabesh lost the election, and the same would happen to Rajesh when he learns about his father's illegal human trafficking business. Bhabesh also strategizes to marry Rajesh to Sulekha, the Municipal head's daughter, so that he can win more votes. This marriage alliance, in some ways, reveals his true intentions to Rajesh as he tells his son that he wants political power as he has conquered all other happiness (money, wealth, and women). He wants political authority, which would give him omnipotent power and capability, and for that, Rajesh has to marry Sulekha, the daughter of the municipal head of Ranipur.

Apart from the trope of deception and marriage, both films end differently. At the same time, everything falls back into place in *Deya Neya*, with B.K Roy accepting his son singing professionally after he heard him singing on stage, making him emotional. Prasanta also agreed to help him with the family business. *Bauthan* (Ashim's wife) turns a matchmaker and introduces Sucharita to Prasanta's mother as a potential bride for her son. On meeting Prasanta, the mother is elated and relieved, with only a slight mention of her deteriorating health. With a slight pretense of anger and shyness, Sucharita also consents to the marriage proposal, running to the balcony and falling into Prasanta's arms in the last shot as the film ends. The balcony is an ambiguous space, as mentioned in chapter 2, where the hero can romance his heroine away from the family's gaze.

In all this, her best friend Suchi, who never left her side in other scenes, is eliminated and not present in the last scene, and the family's misunderstanding finally resolves. Her purpose in bringing the couple together as she was an essential yet minor character and thus not required

further than the initial scenes, in which she is the 'third wheel' and interrupter between Hirdoyhoron, aka Abhijeet and Sucharita. The climax in *Deya Neya* is a private gathering of family and friends, as everything becomes 'merrier' and does not need the interference of Suchi as the third wheel.

Whereas, in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, the story ends with Bhabesh's unexpected suicide. The Kolkata police learn about Bhabesh's illegal income from Rajesh and Bibha, and raid the small hut he was staying on the outskirts of the town, pretending that he was serving Ranipur after donating all his property and wealth. By living in a small hut, Bhabesh tries to trick people into thinking he has given up all pleasure in serving society. This manipulation was one of his old strategies to win the local election. The audience might expect Bhabesh to serve time in jail and come out as a 'good' man, but he commits suicide in the end. The star character chooses death over life. The audience has always kept Uttam Kumar on a pedestal and would not have taken that well. Despite being impossible to imprison, Bhabesh must die by the film's end to provide the closure demanded by Uttam Kumar's star persona.

The themes of deception, disguise, desires, power, and marriage are crucial to both films. Bhabesh in *Bagh Bondi Khela* is ambitious and wants to win the election to be the unconquerable figure of power in Ranipur. Prasanta in *Deya Neya* is a simple young man who wants to be a singer and live outside the shackles of his father's beliefs and authority. Both films utilize deception but very differently and use the trope of 'heterosexual marriage' in two ways. Firstly, in *Deya Neya*, it was a way to conclude the story by forming a familial social alliance between Prasanta and Sucharita's families. Secondly, in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, it was a way to gain political benefits for Bhabesh if Rajesh married Sulekha. Neither of the films shows the actual marriage.

In *Deya Neya*, the audience witnesses the proposal, and there is a belief that Prasanta will marry Sucharita. However, in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, the marriage proposal creates further strains between the healing yet fraudulent relationship ties between the father and son.

Next, the discussion is on the visible and hidden masculinity concepts depicted through the film's familial and friendship ties. The ties of friendship run deeper than family ties in *Deya Neya*, and the tie between the stepmother and her stepson is stronger in *Bagh Bondi Khela* than the one between the blood ties of the father and son. To demonstrate the representation of the relationship between genders, I read Sudipta Kaviraj's *Invention of Private Life* (2018) related to the 19th-century values which have survived and reappeared in these films.

Friendships and Solidarity

Sudipta Kaviraj, in *The Invention of Private Life*, writes about the importance of friendship in the modern lifestyle. He emphasizes that the meaning and scope of making friends have shifted with age. It is possible to befriend someone from another 'class and caste' easily due to the new professional fronts, which leads to migration. However, keeping in mind the limitation of 'intimacy' in such relationships is crucial. Social and new forms of occupation help form relations outside kinship, which is observed mainly among the folks of upper-class Bengalis. In his autobiography, there is an emphasis on Sibnath Sastri's friendship rather than his relationship with his immediate family. Kaviraj explains that it was a trend in the reformed lifestyle of modern individuals. According to the West, a filial relationship does not consist of conversation based on a similar mindset, but two friends can discuss all issues of society and can not have similar thinking; both can agree on disagreeing. Kaviraj concludes that the friendship between educated upper-class Bengali individuals was more valuable than the tie with family and

relatives (330-332). Despite the long gap between the 19th-century autobiography of Sibnath Sastri and the primary films discussed here, released in 1963 and 1975, we see some values have been sustained and passed on, which show in new literary forms like cinema. In *Deya Neya*, the audience notices the economic gap between Prasanta and Sukanto, belonging to two different social groups: *madhyabitta* and *nimna-madhyabitta* families. In one scene, Ashim and Prasanta reminisce about their college days, and Prasanta shares his concern regarding the deteriorating health of Sukanto, which, according to him, is due to his birth in a low-income family.

Ashim- *Sukanto ki khobor re?* (How is Sukanto?)

Prasanta- *Oi ekhe rokom.* (The same as he was.)

Ashim- *Ki rokom?* (That is how?)

Prasanta- *Ei roge ja hoi arki? Frustration.* (The usual in this disease frustration.)

Ashim- *Acha genius hole ki erokom hobe?* (Tell me, will this always happen if one is a genius?)

Prasanta- *Na, gorib er ghore jonma lee hobe.* (No, if one is born in poverty, I guess.)

(*Deya Neya* 0:22:49-0:23:05)

The friendship between the men are based on support, care, and modern moral values in the film. Prasanta's friendship with Sukanto (Premangshu Bose) shows the audience the hero's caring and tender side as Sukanto is suffering from tuberculosis. Prasanta left some money with Sukanto's wife before leaving for Kolkata. We see Prasanta and Ashim take the necessary steps to save their college friend Sukanto and his wife from dying in poverty without treatment. They aid him by providing the necessary financial and emotional support.

Prasanta's relationship with Ashim is one of empathizing and caring. They talk about their life together, growing nostalgic, and are even shown singing songs and planning to help Sukanto by doing a concert at the end of the movie, money from which will go to Sukanto's treatment. While Prasanta's relationship is cordial and caring with his college mates, his relationship with his father is strained, which becomes a problem in his caring relations with his mother. On knowing about his mother's illness through his servant, Prasanta becomes concerned but refuses to return due to his ego. By the end of the film, the father and son come to some kind of agreement despite having different values. (As mentioned in chapter 2)

Whereas, the importance of friendship is questioned in *Bagh Bondi Khela* when Dolon considers Rajesh's gesture of giving back her father's property to her only because he was interested in her 'romanticly.' (More about this scene in the discussion on 'Love and Romance' below)

Familial Relationships - Fatherhood

Several women characters in both films have the supposed motherly instincts of caring, loving, and protecting. In *Deya Neyya*, Prasanta's relationship with his mother (Chhaya Devi) is compassionate and filled with love and care. She knows about her son's singing from the beginning and plays the intermediary between the father and the son. Only after she falls sick does the father become concerned about Prasanta's whereabouts. While she is closest to her son in the first scene, Prasanta refuses to return to Lucknow even after knowing about his mother's sickness. He takes it as a matter of honor. This refusal to return home is read in light of Freud's Oedipus complex theory. The son rejects the mother and takes under the father's shadow as the father stands as the ruler, the patriarch in the society. Prasanta shows his father that he can now be 'independent,' treating his mother as a mere means to this end.

However, the parents are for a more significant part of the story, at the margins, and only appear in the first few scenes and then in the scene preceding the climax. They do have some significant decisive roles to play— the mother's ailment initiates a relationship of understanding between the father and son. The father agrees to accept his son's singing, considers him a talented singer, and approves the marriage alliance between Sucharita and Prasanta, as discussed above. Father and son reconcile in their patriarchal struggle for power within the family, and women are designated their 'proper' position.

In *Bagh Bondi Khela*, Kalyani (the mother) lives in the memory of her son, Rajesh, as she is dead and appears in his flashbacks. She symbolizes Rajesh's childhood and traumatic past. She is an essential character because, through her, we learn about young Bhabesh. The audience would know about Kalyani from her son's memory. Kalyani, which means auspicious, is the submissive, obedient first wife of Bhabesh. She obeys all his orders with only a slight protest, but the *Kali* (revengeful) deity inside her—as shown in the film— grows stronger after Bhabesh brings a dancer to their house. She cries in front of the photographic frame of the Goddesses *Kali*, hanging on the wall in a scene of contrasts, as Bhabesh sings and enjoys with the dancer Asmani. She finds a dagger like the one Goddess *Kali* has and goes to the *verandah* (courtyard). She later promises that she will witness till the end the deterioration and downfall of her husband but will not leave the house when threatened to move out.

The inspiration for the female characters of the film is from the 'popular images' circulated as early as the nineteenth century. In *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, Tanika Sarkar writes about how the image of a female body was 'reproduced and restrained' during the 19th century. She cites the narratives of writers and nationalists, who put women at par with the image of the nation. The

image of *Kali*, which symbolizes the mother's rage, was sung by Shakta poet Ramprasad Sen and became famous. The figure of Indian motherhood represents being more caring (Sarkar 252). Writers such as Bankimchandra and Abanindranath Tagore have constructed contrary mother figures in Bengali literature. Bankim created three images of the mother for the national Imagination. The figures are of *Jagaddhatri* (mother of the universe) or *Annapurna* (food giver), described to have abundance, tranquility, and glory. The image of *Bharatmata* by Abanindranath Tagore also represents her as scared and weak. She is the mother crying out for help. Later, Gandhi's chakra (wheel) would symbolize Lord Krishna providing cloth to *Draupadi* to prevent her distress (Sarkar 254-255). Bankim has also written about the powerful destructive anger of almighty Goddesses *Kali* since the Swadeshi struggles. *Kali* symbolizes shame, destruction, and a woman who has given up her feminine self and sense of ignominy. The poet, Mukunda Das, has also invested in developing the figure of *Kali*, in all her anger and destructive power, compared to *Mahishasurmardini Durga*, represented as a daughter visiting her natal father's place with her children. However, she appears to stand over the demon she killed in the duel to win over evil (Sarkar 256-257).

Bepin Chandra Pal has pushed back and relocated the image of *Kali* into a submissive woman by portraying a woman in a domestic environment surrounded by her children who take it on them to protect her and their nation (Sarkar 257). As mentioned in chapter 1, the characters in these films are an extension of Bengali literature over time, and we find such attributes of motherhood as *Annapurna* and *Jagaddhatri*, along with the rage of *Kali* and the domestic image of *Mahishasurmardini Durga* in the image of the women in the two primary films.

Nineteen-century Bengali literature inspires the representation of new women in these films.

Tanika Sarkar dedicated a chapter to analyzing the life of an ‘upper-caste woman’ writer Rashsundari Debi. Her autobiography, *Amar Jiban*, was the first Bengali autobiography by any upper-caste woman to get published. Sarkar writes that her life was mundane. Born in 1809 and married at fourteen to a landlord in Faridpur. She gave birth to twelve children. Rashsundari learned to read on her own at twenty-five, reading all the religious texts at home (95-98). Rashsundari was supervising everything at her in-law by fourteen. Furthermore, she used the metaphor of a ‘cage’ to describe her life. She writes about her daily religious practices, domestic chores, and continued pregnancy (Sarkar 121). Rashsundari also writes about dietary habits and other women in her family. She has written that if a woman asks for food, she has no shame; if she does not ask, she may have to remain on an empty stomach. Sarkar points out that femininity intertwines with the declining appetite. As a result, *Annapurna*, the goddess of food thought of as the antithesis of *Kali*, the feminine shakti, was built. The building of *Annapurna*, the goddess of food, the opposite representation of *Kali*, the female shakti, was inspired by Sarkar’s instances of female saints who requested an abundance of food (122). Rashsundari shows no interest in kitchen work which ruins her *Annapurna* image. Rashsundari has written that the ‘sexual body’ is like the kitchen where a woman gets trapped. (Sarkar 122-123). Such a representation of women was common in the nineteenth century.

However, it could only measure up to a certain extent with the circumstances faced by the women of Independent India. The film *Bagh Bondi Khela* represents multiple times the atrocity faced by Kalyani through flashbacks in the narrative. In one scene, she pleads with Bhabesh to save some food for her son and sister-in-law (Lotika). In a subsequent scene, she faces verbal abuse when confronting Bhabesh and the dancer he brought home, but she becomes defensive

and heroic, carrying a weapon. At the same time, she complains about her child's suffering and misery to Bhabesh, fighting not for her but for her son. Molly Haskell observed that mothers in Hollywood are the epitome of sacrifice, and her center of desire belongs to the need and want of children. She provides everything a child needs at any cost. Mothers are not supposed to have their desires, but fathers can have their desires. Sanyal divides the Hollywood mother figure into two groups: the first is the 'angel in the house,' the 'good' mother as Kalyani, who fights for her son, and the second is the 'evil' mother, who always also gets punished by the end of the film (Sanyal 31-32). The image of mothers in both films is of 'angel in the house'; even the stepmother Bibha in *Bagh Bondi Khela* is depicted as a kind woman who guides his step-son Rajesh on the moral path.

In *Bagh Bondi Khela*, there are two mother figures. Firstly Kalyani, who resides in the thoughts of Rajesh, represents the cruelty of young Bhabesh, and secondly, Bibha witnesses the downfall of Bhabesh as he grows old. The mother figures of Bibha and Kalyani are contradictory. While Kalyani endures and says that she would like to see how far he goes and thus depicts a feminine figure of tolerance, Bibha refuses to be the feminine figure who is passive and takes control of the narrative. She takes the necessary steps to redeem her husband. The two characters are similar in that both reduce their subjectivity to serving their husband, as they are still 'wives' and 'mothers' in the film. There are continuous scenes where Bibha faithfully abides by her dutiful role as a wife. However, there are differences too. Bibha has a more active role in the plot. From the beginning, we see a mysterious woman (Bibha) at the station as Rajesh meets Bhabesh after thirteen years. Next, at the court where she stops Rajesh and asks him to ask where his father earns his wealth before signing up to be his heir and inherit the properties. When Bhabesh falls

sick; she stays at his place, attending to him, and calling for a doctor. Bibha belongs to Bangladesh and tells Rajesh later that, as any Bangladeshi woman, 'I can accept all faults of my husband. Their husband's house is everything to them; it was the same for me. However, I could not live there because Bhabesh drove me away.' Bibha then tells him that she got manipulated, like he is now manipulating Rajesh for power and money. Bhabesh had earlier given all his property to Bibha, but after his reason to do so was served, he took them away. Bibha also tells him that he has acquired all the property by bullying and cheating innocent people. Bibha pleads with Rajesh not to return to his job but stay in Ranipur and help his father redeem his corrupt life and become a moral person. Hence, it can be said that the role of women as mothers and wives is crucial for the men in the film. Next, the chapter discusses heterosexual couples and the gender-specific representation of the female actors in the two movies.

Love And Romance

In modern Bengali society, there was a significant shift in writing about women as objects of 'universal' possession. New writers depict women as emotional and do not emphasize their appearance compared to earlier writings. The female protagonist is present to be possessed by the male protagonist and not for the pleasure of any other male gaze. The women were represented as emotional beings and not just for their appearances. The couple falls in love with each other as the hero sees something apart from physical beauty in the heroine. Such a union takes on a metaphorical quality because their marriage is about compassion (Kaviraj 33-34). The modern novel emphasized inner beauty, refreshment, and understanding, which led to the shift in portraying women as objects to subjects with emotional content. Such women were appreciated to have individual minds and primarily appear in Tagore's writing, where the writer describes the

female protagonist as an ‘ordinary.’ Apart from outer beauty, such women depicted morality and sensitivity in their characters.

A Bildungsroman typically follows the same pattern: the protagonist meets someone, makes a mistake that leads to trouble, and finally resolves the problem at the end. The characters in bildungsroman are not interchangeable and thus are essential for modern narratives on ‘self-reflection’ (Kaviraj 34-35). Using Kaviraj’s interpretation, *Deya Neya* is a movie that portrays its female lead as a ‘progressive,’ college-going woman. He writes that unlike earlier, where there were only fixed ideas of representing the male as wise and confident and the female as the epitome of beauty and flirt, in modern novels, the couple has an emotional attachment (35-36). Despite how ‘sensitive’ and ‘moral,’ the film does not stop from reducing Sucharita as an object for the ‘male gaze’ as when Anuman, the servant at Sucharita’s house, asks Hridoyhoron (Prasanta) about Sucharita as “*Apne kemon dekhla?*” Prasanta replies, “*jinesh*” (item) (0:39:51-0:39:53). This above exchange between Hridoyhoron and Anuman (a servant) was supposedly a comic scene in the film where the heroine is reduced to the common stereotype that she is a snotty rich spoiled niece of her wealthy uncle, without her subjectivity.

Partha Chatterjee traces the literature on women who adopt western ideals and writes that essays, jingles, poems, dramas, novels, and satires were written and performed to warn the men about the strange ways of Bengali women in some families. Writers like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Dinabandhu Mitra, Jyotirindranath Tagore, Upendranath Das, and Amritlal Bose initiated writing on works that usually revolve around criticizing women who imitate European women and try to be ‘*mamsaheb*.’ Such writing of criticism rejected the ‘new morals, fashion, and modern lifestyle for women. The men rejected wearing blouses and petticoats, which cloth the

women's body much better than a piece of cloth wrapped around (saree). They also rejected reading, sewing, decorating homes in newer ways, and traveling by carriages. They refuse these 'luxuries' by claiming that western women do not care for their husbands, home, and children. An example given by Chatterjee is by quoting the work of Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay in *Paribarik Prabandha (Essays On Family)*. Mukhopadhyay blames the woman for neglecting household work, especially in a middle-class family where the husband earns sufficient, and women hire servants to do daily chores, leading to diseases and early risks of death among children (121-125). Neither Sucharita nor Dolon is married and has to take care of children, but drapes sarees, a marker of modern attire, as Mukhopadhyay points out. The women appear to walk down the street with unrelated men—Dolon converses at cafes with her male pals about news/politics and attends protests. Sucharita also goes outside, purchasing a tape of Abhijeet's most recent music video or riding a car to college. Even toward the movie's climax, she attends Abhijeet's music performance with a roomful of men rather than female followers.

"Modernity at Home: Leisure, Autonomy and the New Woman in India" by Abigail McGowan illustrates the condition of living and domestic consumption in middle-class households through posters and calendar art in British India by citing journals of the famous couple Lilabai Patwardhan, a poet Madhavrao Patwardhan and Anandibai Karve, social reformer D.K. Karve (1-3). McGowan emphasizes that by the middle of the twentieth century, family size has decreased; women had more time in their hands and were represented alongside men in hotels, sharing quality time (3). However, these images were circulating in the market; in reality, the 'modern woman' has no time in hand, as Anadabai recalls in her journal. In 1954, a calendar demonstrated women enjoying self-care time alone: reading, dressing up, or ideally seating (McGowan 7-9). *Deya Neya* represents such images of a 'new woman' through the unnamed

wife (Lily Chakravarty) of Ashim and the protagonist, Sucharita. Lily Chakravarty, referred to as *bouthan* by Prasanta, is the epitome of a 'modern woman' who spends time in front of the mirror decking up for a date with her husband, chit-chatting with her husband, Prasanta and Sucharita (As discussed in Chapter 1). Mahaluxmi Soap Company (1955) released a calendar depicting a woman sitting outside in the *verandah* (courtyard), with a table spotlessly clean, showing the after-effects of the cleaning process. McGowan quotes McClintock to elucidate that domestic help comes from lower economic backgrounds to help the 'new woman' of middle-class households (9). Throughout the movie, *Bauthan* gives instructions to a washerman and asks the servants to cook or perform other household duties. McGowan also writes about Nazir Ahmed's Urdu novel *Mirat ul-'Arus* or *The Bride's Mirror*, about the ideal housewife Asghari and her traditional way of looking after the household without giving herself a pause of self-care. Ahmed claimed that the success of the entire house was due to the wife's commitment to managing the household. According to the author, the idea of contemporary 'leisure' is useless for raising a healthy family (4-5).

Deya Neya falls under the romantic comedy genre. However, as we watch the film, romance and love are celebratory in a heterosexual marriage, as represented through Ashim and his wife's relationship; they represent the new *madhyabitta* (middle-class) family living in the city alone and independently. Sukanto and his wife, who are struggling, gave a contrasting image as they belong to a *nimna-madhyabitta* (lower middle-class family), living separately from a joint family. While in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, we see a dysfunctional family where the mother, Kalyani, is the epitome of tolerance, and the father, Bhabesh, is cruel and corrupt, which breaks the family apart. Their son Rajesh grows up in his uncle's joint family, where everyone sits together to eat

and advise Rajesh. *Bagh Bondi Khela* hardly represents romance and romantic love as it is a social satire released during the emergency (1975).

In both films, the role of the heroines is imperative. They signify the 'modern women' who do not stay inside the house's four walls but also have their own voices. There is a gap in the social background of *Deya Neya's* Sucharita and *Bagh Bondi Khela's* Dolon. Both are college students, Sucharita is from a wealthy household, and Dolon lives at a rented place with her mother and father after Bhabesh illegally confiscated their house under bad conditions. The audience comes to know about Bhabesh's deceit through a flashback. After the flashback, Rajesh tells Dolon and her mother that he will give them back their house as his father has passed all his property to him. Dolon then asks him, in the next scene, if his sudden interest stems from the fact that she is a young woman. Rajesh denies such a claim, and Dolon says she doesn't trust rich people like him. Then, she inquires if he will also return any other assets that his father has acquired similarly from others. Dolon refuses to trust him until Rajesh returns all the illegally obtained property to their rightful owners. Here, Dolon embodies the image of *Bharatmata* written by Abanindranath Tagore (Sarkar 254) as she stands for the weak and helpless people of Ranipur, whom Bhabesh has also robbed.

Rajesh- "*Baba jader thokia chen, tara shobai toder nejo paba phira paben*".

(Everyone cheated by my father will get their land back".)

Dolon- "*Esh! Ei Kotha ta Jodi tumi aaj meeting a Daria bolte na, bishon hatali pata, Ek din e hero hoy jeta*". (If only you had said this in the meeting today, you would have got applause and become a hero.")

Rajesh - "*Kotha ta mone hoy Tomar bishshash holo na?*" (I think you did not trust me?)

Dolon- "*Kotha moton kaaj kore dikhao. Tarpora to bishshash*". (First, show me in action, then I will trust you.)

(*Bagh Bondi Khela* 1:02:42-1:02:52)

In a subsequent scene, we see Rajesh under pressure after being rescued by Bhabesh as he orders his security guards and servants to throw out the men at the gate and the group sitting inside demanding back their property and wealth. Dolon attempts to outsmart Rajesh by sending all the people duped by his father and causing a commotion which Bhabesh then sorts at his house. We see the two different portrayals of masculinity in the scene where Bhabesh, the old patriarch, holds power and authority over his son and the other men due to his reputation and power.

Music and Dance

Music is integral to Bengali films; Uttam Kumar's movies are known to have some of the best songs and choreography. *Deya Neya* is a romantic comedy with eight songs that help further the plot. The opening song is *Ei Gaane Prajapati* (The butterfly song) by Sandhya Mukhopadhyay, is shot in a studio and introduces Uttam Kumar as a rising star singer who is passionate about his work. He swings his arms throughout the scenes as he instructs the female singer, "*Shonchorita hoecha na. Kono passion pachina. Put more life. Ami ge di ek bar* " (Shonchorita, it is not happening. There is no passion. I will sing it once) (0:05:46). The songs in the films drive the story further.

Sucharita falls in love with Abhijeet Chowdhury as she listens to him on the radio. The song *Jiban Pata proti patay* (This life as a sheet of paper) by Gouri Prasanna Majumdar drives the narrative further as Sucharita decides to find Abhijeet Chowdhury at any cost after listening to his melodious voice on the radio. She even goes to meet him at his friend's Ashim house with her friend Suchi but fails.

Other songs like *Ami the che dekhi shara din* (I keep looking all day long) are romantic songs that are popular even today. The last song in the film, *Gaaney Bhubhon Bhorie Debo* (Songs shall fill the world), is ironic since Prasanta expected this as his final performance, after which he will stop singing and return to Lucknow to run his father's business. However, his father allows him to sing at the film's end.

Aarti Mukherjee's *Madhobi Modhupe Holo Mitali* (Honey Bees become friends) is the song Sucharita sings on her birthday. The audience watches her singing, and in a parallel image, Prasanta sits outside her house, looking stressed. He had received the news of his mother's sickness and that his father had reported him missing at the police station to bring him home. At the end of the song sequence, Prasanta starts living in a hostel to hide from his parents. The house hosted some of his fans, who discussed Sukanto Bose's poetry and his singing, unaware that the famous singer had been staying with them next to their room.

The songs and dance sequence in *Deya Neya* help further the plot, developing Prasanta's character as a singer as we see him singing and practicing instruments like the harmonium several times in the film. Throughout the story, songs play an important role in depicting love and emotions in the characters.

While there are eight songs in *Deya Neya*, there are only two in *Bagh Bondi Khela: Asmani Kabutor* (Song of the pigeon) and the song sung at the dancer's house, where Rajesh finds out accidentally that his father deals in human trafficking. Here Rajesh talks with a woman who tells him about his father's illegal trafficking business. Later, he witnesses Bhabesh instructing his servant to torture a girl who refuses to submit to him. Rajesh tries to help the girl by confronting Bhabesh but runs away as he gets scared of him. He returns to his own home, where Bhabesh then tells him to return to his navy job and never return to Ranipur.

Music in *Deya Neya* is central as it is a romantic musical comedy. Whereas, in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, the song sequence depicts the dark and unkind side of Bhabesh. In a flashback, the audience witnesses the young Bhabesh, despite being a married man with a son, bringing a dancer home and disrupting the peace in his household. Second, when his son Rajesh accidentally finds himself in a brothel, where he eventually talks to a woman and learns that this place is run by ‘Bhobo babu,’ aka Bhabesh Banerjee.

We notice the difference in the status of music and dance in both films. In *Deya Neya*, the young Uttam Kumar is a singer whose father is against music and considers it a job of useless youths with no aim in life. This opinion over musicians is where the father-son opinion mainly differs in the story. The film is depicted from the view of Prasanta, hence showing music in a positive light. To some extent, it has healing power as Prasanta would perform for his sick friend Sukanto so that he can get a suitable treatment. Interestingly, the opposite is happening in *Bagh Bondi Khela* in thirteen years. The patriarch of the family, Uttam Kumar, likes the company of dancers, but in the movie, dancing and singing stands with prostitutes and brothels; therefore, they are not viewed favorably by the general public.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to explain the blurring representation of masculinity and femininity portrayed in Uttam Kumar's *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela* by analyzing the gender roles in the films. *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*, released in different decades, both feature Uttam Kumar in two different masculine characters, which aids in illustrating the evolution of bhadralok masculinity through his persona.

Both movies are melodramas focusing on family structures, but there is a substantial genre shift between them. One is a romantic family drama, and the other is a social film. Uttam Kumar is central in both as the story revolves around him, one in which he is under pressure to join his father's business, and in another, he is a bully who refuses to repent for his past actions. The father in *Deya Neya* disapproves of Uttam Kumar's singing, which is interesting because the son becomes the father in *Bagh Bondi Khela*. Within a decade, Uttam Kumar would develop into that transgressive character who sings and dances with ladies in *Bagh Bondi Khela*. Hence, this chapter portrayed two bhadralok masculinity, the family man image of Uttam Kumar in *Deya Neya* and the image of the 'old patriarch' in *Bagh Bondi Khela*.

CONCLUSION

Uttam Kumar (1926-1980) was an enigmatic star in Bengal from 1954 onwards and continues to cultivate bengali cultural roots as the 'cultural icon' of Bengal, even today. I studied the two phases in the career of Uttam Kumar through the construction of bhadralok masculinity in *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela*. Both films question the 'conventional' ideas of masculinity and challenge the new modern woman's image and her role in the film.

The 'family melodrama' genre was suitable for representing the different masculinity that the actor challenges as melodrama is an amenable genre that has shifted from the novels to film mode and has attained different meanings over the years.

The film depicts the old and new generations of women inspired by the bhadralok writers of the 19th century. The old generation represents the domestic image of *Annapurna* and *Jagadharti* in the film. However, they also depict the raging *Kali* in *Bagh Bondi Khela* through Kalyani as she defends her son, and Bibha does not hesitate to help the police to catch Bhabesh as embodying qualities of *Mahishashurmardini Durga*, who stands for good over evil.

Furthermore, the films represent the 'new modern women' called 'ambivalent' through the new educated generation like Sucharita from *Deya Neya* and Dolon from *Bagh Bondi Khela*. Despite knowing Prasanta deceived her, Sucharita accepts Prasanta's marriage proposal. This submissive and tamed position changes in a decade in *Bagh Bondi Khela*, where Dolon could see through Rajesh's deceptions. She questions Rajesh about his intentions toward her after he gives her back her ancestral property.

Melodrama is primarily known as a women's genre; however, *Deya Neya* and *Bagh Bondi Khela* focus on the changing dynamics of the father and son relationship. Uttam Kumar in *Deya Neya*

plays the son's role, embodying the new morals of independence, and in a decade, the actor shifts to play the part of the father in *Bagh Bondi Khela*. The shift can be traced as the star couple (Uttam-Suchitra) drifted apart in the 1960s, and Uttam Kumar entered the phase of experimenting with his age in his thirties from the late 1960s.

Moreover, the image of Uttam Kumar continues to fascinate and entertain the present generation of Bengalis (*Prabasi Bangali*) as he stands as the symbol of the past, preserving the Bengali culture of the bhadraloks. This identity as the 'cultural icon' of Bengal is possible through the series of recent films and soap operas that have mentioned and acknowledged his work, comparing succeeding actors to the star pairing of Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen.

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