Chapter 2: Fragmented Spaces

Introduction

The Partition of India in 1947 marked the separation of British India into two independent nations - India and Pakistan. It drastically altered the subcontinent's social, cultural, and political landscape. It resulted in one of the largest and most violent mass migrations in the subcontinent's history. In this historical context, Ghatak's Partition trilogy films emerge as a cinematic exploration of the condition of humanity in the aftermath of the traumatic event. Satyajit Ray remarks on Ghatak's obsession with the Partition:

> Thematically, Ritwik's lifelong obsession was with the tragedy of Partition. He himself hailed from what was once East Bengal where he had deep roots. It is rarely that a director dwells so single-mindedly on the same theme. It only serves to underline the depth of his feeling for the subject. (27-28)

On the contrary, Nabarun Bhattachrya thinks "Many say that Partition created an obsession in Ghatak's mind. I think it is not an obsession, but he expressed the responsibility of the two Bengals. Ghatak challenged the very absurdity of dividing a country with the stroke of a pen" ("Amar Smritite *Subarnarekha* O Ritwik" 93). His pain must have been devastating but he also had a responsibility of narrativizing the pain of the Partition. According to Bhaskar Sarkar, Ghatak "remains the most celebrated cinematic auteur of Partition narratives" ("Allegories of Dispersal: Nation and Partition in Indian Cinema, 1947-1977" 305), by tracing the social decay of post-Independence society back to the fundamental sin of the Partition. He further says:

> For Ghatak, Bengal is more than a microcosm of the nation: in his affective horizon, it is the nation. He carries out his critique of a post-independence nationalist project through an intense focus on the problems facing a truncated Bengal—the displacement of refugees, unemployment, poverty and hunger, corruption, indifference, and cynicism. ("*Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition*" 200)

Bashabi Fraser (2008) states that "any work on the Bengal Partition seems incomplete without a reference to Ritwik Ghatak's work" (3), though Ghatak never made a film that depicts the actual events of the Partition. His Partition trilogy comprising of *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Komal Gandhar*, and *Subarnarekha* explores the post-Partition fragmentation of Bengal. My thoughts on the fragmented spaces are the overarching spatial readings of the trilogy. He interweaved his narratives with socio-political and philosophical thoughts. He employed spatial elements as metaphors for the disintegration and displacement caused by the Partition. The films capture the sense of loss, longing, and alienation felt by individuals and communities whose borders have been arbitrarily drawn due to the political decision. Such a decision was a sham to him. Ghatak exploits settings and landscapes, *mise-en-scène,* cinematographic techniques, and soundscape to create that fragmentedness. Moinak Biswas contends:

> Ghatak took one rupture in the history he witnessed as central - the partition of Bengal. As he went on extending that event into a metaphor for everything that was alienating and destructive in the experience of his community, and as he talked about the pervasive degeneration of his country sometimes solely in terms it, he faced puzzlement and even incomprehension from his contemporaries. The full irony of the situation is probably now coming to light: the partition - a joint treachery committed by the colonial power arid the nationalist leadership...the history model of narration itself had to be played with, the

> narrative had to be crossed with elements borrowed from traditional community-centred forms - epic, melodrama, chronicle play, musical theatre. ("Historical Realism: Modes of Modernity in Indian Cinema" 226)

In his film, that is why, the physical spaces also frequently reflect the philosophical, psychological and emotional landscapes of the characters apart from the "community-centred form." They symbolize the disarray and chaos unleashed by the Partition. Adrian Martin writes:

> Ghatak's life and sensibility were marked by the historic trauma of the partition of Bengal in 1947 and all the crises that had led up to it; this compacted trauma became the basis for and the substance of his work in all media: theatre, writing (both fiction and essays), film. ("*Mise En Scène and Film Style: From Classical Hollywood to New Media Art*" 206)

Clearly, Ghatak's cinema comes to conceptualize the aftermath of the Partition on all levels. As already stated, Ghatak's renderings of post-Partition fragmented spaces transcend the physical. He investigates into the collective consciousness of the post-Partition refugees in the guise of his characters. He depicts the internal disintegration and conflict caused by the rupture of their personal and cultural identities. If any artist has ever been deeply moved and intoxicated by the horrors, dishonesty of post-war and post-independence life, and with it a great compassion, it is Ghatak. Those aspects of his pain and suffering life find expressions again and again in the Partition trilogy films ("Subarnarekha Prasange" 53-54). As a result, the characters of these films navigate a fractured world where the lines between the past and present, home and exile, and aspirations and reality blur. This chapter tries to examine how Ghatak's films function as a medium to confront, grapple, and philosophise the complex and enduring aftermath of the

Partition on both the individual and collective psyche, by building spatiality in the following sections. It highlights the human resilience and indomitable spirit that endured the fragmented spaces.

I.The suburb: a site of refugee colony

We have seen the betrayal of the city in *Ajantrik*, rejection of the city in *Nagarik*, and insights into the city in *Bari Theke Paliye*. Now, we see, the refugee middle-class family as situated in the suburb in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, the only commercially successful film in Ghatak's career. It holds an important place in Indian cinema as a depiction of the post-Partition Bengal's time and space. Based on a popular social novel, named *Chenamukh* (The Known Face) by the Bengali novelist Shaktipada Rajguru, the film engages with the socio-cultural consequences of the Partition of Bengal. Neeta, the protagonist, plays the role of the all-caring mother, to her middle-class refugee family consisting of her father, an old retired schoolteacher; her mother with her pervasive bitterness; her elder brother training to be a singer; her younger brother a budding sportsman; and her younger sister, who takes life easy. It sheds light on the struggles of displaced families in the suburb of Calcutta. Neeta sacrifices her aspirations and dreams to provide for her family.[40] For Bishnu Dey, "The world of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* is the everyday world of the displaced middle-class country-exiled family" ("Bangla Filmer Parinoto Rup, Amader Jiban O *Meghe Dhaka Tara*" 234). The psychological and emotional effects of the Partition in the film,

[40] Manishita Dass points out: **"**The film connects Neeta's individual predicament to the traumatic aftermath of the Partition of India (1947) and a gendered critique of the family through an aesthetic that combines the emotional jolts and melodrama with a neo-realist concern for the everyday and modernist strategies of a fragmentation" (x). See The Cloud-Capped Star (Meghe Dhaka Tara).

and its commentary on social inequality, contribute to the spatial politics as well. We shall see the aesthetics of the suburb as a refugee colony in the following paragraphs.

When the film opens, Neeta is seen approaching a lake. We see it was somewhere in a suburb on the fringes of Calcutta.[41] Her brother Shankar is practising on the Hamsadhvani raga, sprawling on the grass beside the lake. Ghatak fills in a host of details of the neighbourhood. The details are of the newly-built refugee colony. There are bamboo-made houses, one after the other. In fact, the Partition of Bengal compelled several Muslims from West Bengal to relocate to East Pakistan, while Hindus from East Pakistan fled to India. In the immediate aftermath of the Partition, millions of people crossed borders in adversity. Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal, was a focal point for incoming refugees as a result of its status as a major urban centre and its geographical proximity to East Pakistan. Refugee colonies were established in the suburban areas around Calcutta, in Jadavpur, Dum Dum, Behala, Bansdroni, and Baranagar, in response to the influx of refugees. They occupied vacant lands, abandoned buildings, and makeshift shelters during the initial chaotic phase of settlements. Over the time, these settlements transformed into organized colonies as a result of governmental and non-governmental interventions. The suburban landscape of Calcutta has been permanently altered by the refugee colonies that were established in the post-Partition period. For instance, the development of Salt Lake City in the 1960s was a significant initiative to resettle refugees in a planned urban space.[42] In Ghatak's film we find these traces of the post-Partition days in a host of details of the

[41]Supriya Debi who played Neeta's role in the film recounts how the scenes were shot in Taratala of the then Calcutta's refugee suburbs. See Amar smritite Ritwik (38) in *Ritwik Ghatak*, edited by Rajat Roy.

[42] See Romola Sanyal's Contesting refugeehood: squatting as survival in post-Partition Calcutta in *Living Through Terror* (2013). Also see Uditi Sen's *Citizen refugee: forging the Indian nation after partition* (2018).

neighbourhood. The grocer stops Neeta to complain that the family is in arrears for over two months. Neeta trips to discover that she has torn her slippers. Shankar pleads with the grocer for a shaving blade on credit, and being rudely refused. The father refers to yet another prospective match having refused Neeta for being "dark." He provides us the information that Neeta has been attending her Masters classes at the University. She is earning forty rupees a month from a couple of tuitions to support the family financially.

These suburb dwellers depend on the city space. They have to go to the city everyday for work. They become labourers in the factory of the city seeing no prospect in any near future (consider Neeta's brother Montu's case as an instance). They come back to the suburb at the end of the day. So, Neeta returns to find everyone demanding. Shankar wants money for a shave and some *jarda*. The younger sister, Geeta, wants to get a new sari. The younger brother, Mantu, has to have his spiked boots for football. They all get their gifts in the very next shots. Neeta has not been able to save anything, though, to replace her ripped slippers. Apart from the family, Neeta has another dependant her boyfriend Sanat, whom she helps to continue his physics research without a scholarship. With all these, the refugee colony turns symbolic of the life of people living on the periphery, on the margins of both the city and the village. The film seeks to capture refugees' inner life and their complexities around their desire to safeguard their selves. It also tries to comprehend how betrayal and scapegoating work and their connections to the displaced, fractured self of exiled beings as well as the refugee psyche. It depicts the human predicament of a refugee whose existence is formed inside the sociopolitical dynamics of exile, and displacement. As it affects the psyche of its characters, the film explores the shock of the

Partition. Nearly all of the film's characters betray Neeta[43] as well as one another. The film also examines how the self of a refugee slowly becomes absent to itself as a refugee unintentionally starts exploiting others to survive by posing questions on love, betrayal, and abandonment. The film shows us how the suburban refugee situation permeates Neeta's inner space and virtually traps her there. In addition, this illness compels her family to defy social norms and morals by secretly requiring Neeta to remain unmarried and provide for the family. Characters' psyche seems to be shaped in ways they did not choose but through the harsh realities of exile depicted here. The film depicts the different ways that people with different personalities process the Partition experience and allow it to impact their mental health.

Ghatak's women often become space-metaphors. They embody both physical and emotional spaces tied to the larger themes of displacement, identity, and cultural fragmentation. It first begins in *Bari Theke Paliye* when Haridas describes his lost mother in the city, and it continues in all the later films. In *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, Neeta becomes the fragmented homeland. Her self-sacrifice and suffering mirror the disintegration of a unified cultural and geographical space, as Bengal was divided during the Partition. Neeta's body, strained and ultimately broken, reflects the land's exploitation, underscoring the connection between the female form and the homeland that sustains but is relentlessly consumed. In *Subarnarekha*, Seeta's journey from an innocent child to a woman forced into prostitution would signify the desecration of the lost

[43] Paulomi Chakraborty argues that *The Cloud-Capped Star* exposes the violence inherent in the process of symbol-making, which can also be characterized as metaphorical, with regard to the category of women. She writes: "...The film shows how a gendered metaphor of woman representing a collective is constructed and how it claims women as sacrificial victims. Specifically, the film offers for examination the process of reification of women into sacrificial motherhood in the culturally sanctioned mould of a mother goddess that lies at the heart of normative and patriarchal cultural nationalism" (159-202). See *The Refugee Woman: Partition of Bengal, Gender, and the Political* (2018).

homeland as well as of the utopic sacred space. Her purity, once tied to a harmonious rural innocence, is sullied as urban chaos and moral decay take over. In *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam*, the women of the fishing community would be integral to the cultural identity of the space. Their presence signifies a connection to tradition and a way of life that is being eroded. Female characters are associated with natural elements—rivers and skies—that symbolize the sublime. The female characters serve as living repositories of memory, anchoring the fragmented psyche of displaced individuals. In *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo*, Bangabala would embody discursive spaces where ideological conflicts and societal disillusionment play out. Her presence underscores the challenges of navigating identity in a fractured socio-political landscape. The women are not just characters but spaces where the struggles of identity, memory, and belonging unfold.

The city, again, cannot be kind to them. In the city, Neeta, the embodiment of the fragmented Bengal, is betrayed by her boyfriend. So, she is found again by the camera at the extreme right edge of the frame. She is outside on the stairs, in a flattened, low-angle shot. Neeta descends the stairs until she reaches us in extreme close-up. The camera moves only a little to allow her face to be framed in an intolerable, static shot, in a moment of pure affection. Her face is immobile, her eyes raised, one hand convulsively grasping her throat. The entire décor is as if effaced. The wall becomes an expressive ground, and gives its violence to the circle of white light. It is very quickly composed and purified at the left of her face. It appears to be the blind vanishing point of a gaze which no longer sees anything. From the shot's opening, the modulation punctuates the descent, step by step. Then it installs itself on the grief-stricken face of Neeta. A whiplashing sound hisses through the air, and strikes a body. It continues almost to the end of the shot. A transition maintains its cruelty right through the passage to the shot of dark angular roofs, and shadows in the courtyard of the building. They seem to impose themselves

like blotches on Neeta's face. Thus the city becomes claustrophobic space. Little by little, Neeta's eyes close in internal pain.[44]

But Ghatak tries to solace them in his own way:

> The Poetry of the earth is never dead:
> When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
> And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
> From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead
>
> - John Keats[45]

Neeta's father takes her for an outing in the countryside. This outing is significant from several perspectives. Actually, a substantial number of Ghatak's characters are the vanquished in the historical processes in which they participate unwillingly. They are present in urban spaces but are marginalized. They feel themselves as outsiders. Their status is comparable to that of citizens, but the city does not recognize them despite being mere city residents. They never recover from this horrific situation. The nature of the refugee home and how Ghatak brings it on the screen has been established in the works of Harrington (2010), Chaudhuri (1997) and Bhattacharya (2011). Ghatak subverts the accepted norms of editing to amplify existing distortions and shake the foundation of any existing 'normative' in film aesthetics. Throughout

[44] Same is Mantu's condition. He also meets with an accident in the factory, and becomes paralyzed.

[45] It is a line from the poem *On the Grasshopper and the Cricket* by John Keats. It conveys the idea that Nature is everlasting, and the beauty of nature is always present, no matter what. I am using it, because it is quoted by the father in the film.

the conversations in the film, the family strikes a variety of poses, resulting in some breathtaking shots. The dialogue contains platitudes, and the continuity of the characters' eye lines is broken. This works well as a cinematic device because it heightens the tension and demonstrates how the characters in the city interact. The purpose of this transformation of the cinematic space into a theatrical space is to serve as a reminder that the simple acceptance or veneration of persecuted refugees by the state does not normalize their lives or their circumstances. The expressions, which are analogous to the desire to be mummified, are a symbolic reference to the suppressed desire for a unified Bengal that has been preserved and unblemished by the pain of Partition. According to Gupta, in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, Neeta's "tuberculosis is the disease of the romantic disposition. The prescribed cure for the disease was a provincial environment of isolation, a rejection of all that was urban and corrupt – the unified Bengal of Ghatak's imagining" (42). Ghatak extrapolates the concept of tuberculosis as a rejection of urban modernity in order to convey his rejection of technologically-driven urban-industrialism. This skepticism toward mindless industrialization is also reflected in his other films, including *Ajantrik,* and *Komal Gandhar*. In all of his films, he reflects on the artificiality of man-made boundaries and reacts with sensitivity and emotion to the natural world. The auteur criticizes the urban space's bourgeois orderliness. He uses tuberculosis and its associated metaphors to resist the rhetoric that life continues and to visualize the agony of those who are excluded from the scope and goal of development (Gupta 38). So, the scene in which Neeta, on the occasion of her birthday, travels to the countryside with her father and Shankar exemplifies the competition between city life and country life. The scene focuses on the fundamental differences between city life and rural life. The outing is significant because it contradicts the modern notion that people prefer to live in urban spaces. The countryside, which geographically resembles their homeland on the opposite

side of the border, yields to the subjective gaze of the three protagonists, who each project their own desires onto the land. This may be due to the resemblance of the countryside to their home country. One of Neeta's father's favourite Keats quotations is "the poetry of the earth is never dead." This is a direct reference to the Partition, as well as the lingering desire for an idyllic space. Almost all of the director's symbolic ambitions of the city space are abandoned. Neeta's father delivers a direct critique of industrial city and its unquenchable desire for material goods by saying, "Suppose there is no money. Significant amounts of nature are always present. To live is to engage in an art." The following frame contains all three of the previously mentioned characters. Neeta is not paying much attention to anything, whereas Shankar is looking towards their father. The subsequent series of close-ups are composed in such a way on purpose that they distort our perception of space. The cuts do not adhere to the conventional pattern of shot followed by reverse shot. After the close-up of Shankar speaking to his father, the camera focuses on Neeta's face. This causes directional confusion, and for a moment it appears that the characters are looking in different directions. As a result, we lose a comprehensive understanding of the space as a whole. The male characters are depicted against a sky background, while Neeta is depicted against a land background. The staging reinforces her connection to the land.

The scene is to emphasize the delicate nature of a fleeting joy. The effects are observed in the general and landscape shots, such as of roads and fields. Initially the scene is presented in a close shot where the bus fills the frame and the father, daughter, and brother disembark. The initial framing enhances the subsequent sense of spatial liberation. It extends and expands the space. The shots, despite being focused on the action of "the outing," effectively deconstruct time through the deliberate use of pauses between frames and the resulting disorientation. The accumulation of unbalanced perspectives within each frame further contributes to the temporal

decomposition. Every shot, devoid of subjectivity, appears to correspond to a specific gaze, whether it is that of Ghatak himself or the three interconnected characters. In contrast to the initial shots and their depiction of internal turmoil, a subsequent series of shots emerges. They feature the three characters positioned motionless within the landscape. Initially captured together in a close-up frame, they are subsequently portrayed individually in close-up shots. The observation underscores the inherent challenge of coexisting harmoniously within the confined space. Much like Eisenstein, who was one of Ghatak's influences, the montage in this film maintains a narrative quality. It lacks any explicit symbolic purpose or identifiable meaning, instead emphasizes the flow of expressivity that consistently leads to an intensity of impression. In the close-up frame featuring the trio, each individual's back is facing the others. It creates a sense of limited potential for interaction, despite their verbal communication. The close-up shots depict the characters in a framed manner. This framing technique eliminates the perception of the overall spatial context and disrupts the natural relationship between the bodies. Each appearance of the characters is abrupt, as if it is a result of a collision caused by the preceding and subsequent apparitions. Therefore, the movement of Neeta's head turning, occurring twice, remains ambiguous as to its origin in the anterior region of space. Sufficient shots and reverse shots are present, reminiscent of classical film scenes. They engender a discernible spatial context for us. However, it is important to note that this space remains suspended due to its inherent instability and the internal tension present in each frame. As a result, the space is subjected to a certain force, a compulsion that appears to grant it a sense of autonomy with each occurrence. The precise location of the point-of-view remains elusive, despite our perceptible awareness of its influence. The positioning of each body in relation to other bodies is constantly and continuously adjusted based on the axes of the gaze which serve to both isolate and connect.

Axes devoid of any means of escape, carriers of an indescribable vitality: the type that individuals possess when they are simultaneously united and isolated. The artistic technique of *découpage* achieves a similar effect as music, facilitating the circulation of emotions and sentiments. It is worth noting that in this scene, the unobtrusive music serves as a background, running continuously beneath the spoken word in a conventional manner. It seems as if happiness is only in the pastoral space.

In the late nineteenth century, when travel to a better climate was invented as a cure for tuberculosis, the most contradictory environments, including the desert, mountains, and a final drop into a reclusive sanatorium, were projected as therapy – the variety emphasized their commonality, which was a rejection of the contemporary urban space (Sontag 35). Prior to the invention of the tuberculosis medication, it was standard practice to expose tuberculosis patients to a "provincial environment." This prescription is a metaphor for a pathological rejection of the modern nation-state, a withdrawal from the trappings of bourgeois life in that century, and a means of "escaping" oneself into isolation. Neeta is a metaphor for the idyllic. It contrasts with the push towards modernization in an increasingly developmentalist city as well as the nation state. Neeta's journey from the countryside to the city (the site of the modern) deviates from the archetypal trajectory. It indicates Ghatak's discomfort with the discourse surrounding development, and the inevitability of displacement within it. This discomfort is demonstrated by Neeta's travels. Neeta is permitted to cast her longing gaze upon the city, but the city will never return the gaze, notice her or her agony, or acknowledge her struggle. As a result, she is never permitted to be domiciled, and her journey is always an outward journey. Numerous residents of the prosperous periphery were excluded from the benefits of the haphazard urbanization that was creating pockets of prosperity. Neeta had no choice but to slowly waste away: "I never protested

against any injustice," just like the rest of the migrant population, which lacked not only the means of subsistence, but also an identity. The spread of tuberculosis in her body can be attributed to a system that is riddled with injustice and despondency in the city space.

From the standpoint of building the being of exile, the sequence following Neeta's discovery of her illness and moving to the outer most periphery of thir residence is quite important. The Umasangeet "Uma, come to my lap"[46] vanishes in the backdrop as the sequence starts, and the jackals' sound fades as well. Neeta is positioned front and foremost in the frame; although her upper body and face are somewhat defocused as well, she is composed to the forefront. Of Neeta and her mother, just the two figures are lit in the whole frame. When the mother asks, "Why are you making your bed in the outer room?" Neeta answers, "Inner or outer, what difference does it make in this house?" in great relevance. The conversation thus highlights the speech of the slow ousting of Neeta from the house. When her father orders her to leave, she rapidly bundles her possessions and the ousting reaches its zenith. Thus, Neeta turns into an embodiment of being in exile, standing on the farthest edge of the house and giving away some of her deteriorating belongings, giving the film the ultimate metaphor of exile.

Shankar becomes a successful singer with a national reputation. He visits the family, takes it upon himself to give the family a new two-storeyed house and all the support it need. He

[46] Ghatak situates the Durga myth in the contemporary post-independence Indian world, where the economic collapse of the middle class has deprived women of the option to marry. Here, the myth's main theme—Gouri's union with Shiva—is completely reversed. Ironically, some Neetas will eventually join Shiva, the *Mahakal* that will ultimately devour them.

puts Neeta into a sanatorium in the hills of Shillong. In the penultimate sequence, Shankar visits Neeta at the sanatorium and tells her about changes back home. She throws away an early letter written by Sanat in which he had "discovered" her as "a cloud-capped star." Through the character of Neeta, the film graphically examines the concept of home and homelessness. Neeta now lives in a refugee colony that was established after the Partition. However, due to the psychological effects of the Partition, she no longer feels at home in this house. The film explores the predicament and fundamental homelessness of a refugee, based on an ongoing search for a home and the anguish of never being able to belong to any home other than that is lost. The only consistent element in Sanat's life is most likely her letter about the house she had desired to live in. Just before she passes away, she finally lets go of the letter and gives up on this house as well, even though she had clung to it despite his betrayal. On a deeper level, the film demonstrates how Neeta and Shankar are each other's sanctuary since they embody what it means to be home to one another. Neeta suffers a split in her life and starts to collapse when Shankar leaves in protest. From this point on, her breakdown begins. Throughout the whole film, especially during her most desperate moments, Neeta is clinging to a photo of her early years. When her father tells her to leave the house, she takes her lost home with her, so this picture also represents her quest to find it. In the first ever outburst of passion displayed in the course of the film, Neeta cries out: "I'd love to live. I'll live. Tell me, brother, for once, that I'll live...I wanted live." She has to die ultimately in the hills, another site of escape from harsh reality. Ghatak's camera pans across the indifferent hills,[47] creating negative spaces on the screen.[48]

[47] In this regard, Kumar Shahani said, "Nita, even as she dies, asserts itself against the grand indifference of nature. Ritwik's films are replete with semi-circular panoramic which show that nature is too great a container for individual sentiment. It is implied in the contradiction that while characters often express their own feelings — and

That's how Ghatak ventures into a realm where internal landscapes intertwine with physical spaces. The concluding plea of Neeta extends beyond her character. It embodies Neeta as the fragmented nation, the fragmented Bengal, the struggles of displaced people in the wake of the Partition. Upon the mention of the word *pahar,* Neeta always gazes off-screen with a distant demeanour. She approaches us with a swift and instinctive motion, as the camera angle adjusts to include her within the frame once again. Moving closer, her eyes are slightly averted to avoid direct contact with the camera, and she visualises the sight of the hills. This moment is undeniably impactful. The frames consist of stationary shots featuring the hills, trees, valleys, and rocks. These shots are subsequently juxtaposed with a sequence of smooth dissolves, which reveal long almost 360 degree panning centred on similar natural motifs. These movements abruptly emerge. They showcase the motifs against the backdrop of an expansive sky. The internal visual representations that Neeta generates within her mind of the landscape she holds dear. They outline the inferred path of her journey to the sanatorium. It has been consistently developed throughout the entire film, particularly through the implementation of highly modulated music and sound effects. Interestingly, the film reaches a point where it no longer relies on the soundscape, as the emotional intensity becomes embedded within the visual composition itself. Ultimately, the ensuing leap in emotional impact is complemented by the music. It possesses a straightforward yet evocative power.

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often, even social failure — through the poetry of nature, the pathetic fallacy is an untruthful device" (120). See *I Am Burning, The Universe Is Burning.*

[48] "(Ghatak)...said the negative space was intentional. The right side is empty so the audience would see left automatically...no matter how small it is, that would be the frame then. That's what they would see because this is a moving image" (108). See cinematographer Purnendu Bose' Interview in Technology and Cinema in Bengal: A Historical Overview, restored by The Media Lab, Jadavpur University Film Studies Department.

The suburb, ultimately, functions as a liminal space—a threshold between the rural and urban. Displaced from their homeland, refugees find themselves in a state of in-betweenness, where the suburb represents both a temporary shelter and a site for reconstructing permanence. This duality imbues the suburb with an ambivalent character: it is neither fully integrated into the urban order nor entirely detached from its rural past. For refugee colonies, the suburb is both a space of survival and a site of resistance. It provides physical shelter while also becoming a symbolic space where refugees negotiate their identities, in opposition to the dominant urban centre. The suburb becomes a space of otherness that reflects and contests the broader societal structures. Lefebvre's concepts on the production of space are crucial for understanding how refugee colonies shape and are shaped by the suburban space. Refugees do not merely occupy suburban spaces; they actively transform them through their practices, and cultures. For instance, the refugee colonies in the post-Partition Bengal as we discussed earlier, particularly around Calcutta, evolved into vibrant hubs of cultural and political activity. These spaces challenge the planned, homogenous ideal of urban space. This reconfiguration of space reflects their agency in asserting their right to inhabit and shape the suburb despite economic, social, and political marginalization. While the suburb offers refugees a semblance of stability, it is also a site of alienation. Displaced populations carry the trauma of loss—of homeland, culture, and community—which is compounded by the precarity of suburban existence. The suburb becomes a space of mourning and memory, where refugees grapple with their fragmented identities, and that is what Ghatak's film conveys.

II.Musical excursion to make us face the fragmentation

Komal Gandhar[49] is the second film of the Partition trilogy. In the light of the IPTA,[50] the film follows a group of Bengali theatre artists as they stage productions in the city and remote villages. Ghatak explores the complexities of rebuilding artistic communities and reconciling fragmented identities after the Partition through the interactions and conflicts between the characters. The struggles of the artists to find their place in a fragmented world, and to cope with the loss of their artistic traditions is explored in Ghatak's film. He depicts the theatre group as a microcosm of a society in transition, in which artists from various regions and backgrounds collaborate to create art. Ghatak juxtaposed the fallout from the Partition of India with the divided leadership of the IPTA movement, and Anasuya's dilemma in the film. We see an inter-textual approach, layering of history with allusions, and a relay of setting and sound in moving images to evoke a sense of musical excursion to make us face the fragmentation due to the Partition. This is what we shall see here.

According to Mrigankashekhar Roy,"*Komal Gandhar* is the most fruitful expression of a rebellious spirit" (243) of Ghatak. The director's individualism in handling the subject-matter is memorable in the film. For Dhruba Gupta, the Bengal of his poetic imagination is found in it.

[49] The film opens with a performance of the play *Dalil* (Document), a play written and directed by Ghatak himself for the IPTA, in the early 1950s. It is being staged by a non-professional, experimental theatre group, named Nireeksha (meaning probe in Bengali), led by the central male figure Bhrigu (played by Abanish Banerjee). The play is set against the Partition of India in 1947, and centres on a family forced to leave its homeland in East Bengal. People are joining the mass exodus across the river Padma, from East Bengal to Calcutta. The film moves from stage to backstage.

[50] Even for Ravi Shankar, "*Komal Gandhar* is a lively and strong record of Bengal's IPTA movement" (67). See Chitravash's *Komal Gandhar* special issue.

Bengal's natural beauty and its intense magic – its *khoai*, Kurseong, the plane of Bengal seen from the top of the mountain are all there. Moonlit night on the banks of the river is there. "Rabindra Sangeet is the space's evocative accompaniment" (Gupta "Komal Gandhar" 77–79). Bengal and its cultural richness complement each other. In Rajadhkshya's view, the central focus of the film revolves around Bhrigu and Anasuya, two distinct individuals, and the chasm that has existed between them in the past. As it depicts their existence and hardship, a hardship that is deeply linked to their efforts to reconcile a traumatic past with their present survival as an individual and as members of a tradition, the film evolves into a depiction of forces that transcend the individual. He says:

> Ghatak constantly draws upon motifs that show the unity that he felt still existed between the peoples of the two Bengals, contrasting these with the actual state of things in Calcutta. The initial cleavage thus goes deeper and deeper, with a constant opening out as we glimpse the traditions that unite the two groups still, and a dissolving into the entrapment of the urban milieu divided by petty bourgeois ambition. This divide extends spatially: the Bengali countryside where the troupe performs contrasted by Calcutta itself or the freedom of the hills in Darjeeling giving way to the small room in Calcutta hemmed in even more by the rain. (Rajadhyaksha 82–96)

Sajedul Awwal rightly concluded:

> He (Ghatak) was very experimental in his choice of subject matter and style...various cultural-roots-paradigms, including overtones, folk reforms, secularized religious narratives, contingency, hyperbole, myths, hyperdramatism, folk songs, folk wisdom, archetypes, are implanted in various cultural-roots-paradigm scenes and sounds. And it is

> from this source that Ghatak has become the original farmer of the Bengali film industry who cultivated the seeds of the native variety of Bengali films. (367)

Rather than showing the story, Ghatak has made his content wider and that is why he called it an "intellectual film." One has to understand the significance of the story with mind-intelligence-memory. One must match social-historical-political context of it.

The film was shot at various locations, including Bolpur-Shantiniketan, Lalgola, Budge Budge, near Bracebridge of Calcutta, Dumdum Airport, and Kurseong. The indoor shooting sessions took place at Technicians Studio. The New Empire Theatre in Calcutta served as the venue for the staging of scenes from the plays.[51] The film primarily depicts the urban populace within the metropolis of the then Calcutta. However, unlike the third part of the first chapter, the citizens of Calcutta make outward journeys to various destinations of Lalgola, Bolpur, Budge Budge and Kurseong. As Biswas puts it, "a rule of coming out of Calcutta is woven into the structure of the story" ("Nisorgo O Natyalap" 106). According to Iraban Basuroy, on the other hand, "Ghatak's characters want to reject the city again and again. As if the creator Ghatak wanted to keep away the citizens' minds from the city carefully" ("Ritwiker Cinema: Nagar O Nagarikota" 84). It is ironic, truly, that, he could never identify with the city where he composed all his works of art. The narrative of the film incorporates a principle of departing from Calcutta. The "outings" are strategically positioned within the narrative framework akin to punctuation marks (Biswas "Nisorgo O Natyalap" 106). There is indeed a glimpse of it at the very first, in the shot of Anasuya watching the rain through the window. Even in the film *Nagarik*, there was a far

[51] See *Komal Gandhar* special issue published by Chitravash (10).

hand of going for outings from the calendar hanging on the wall of the room. The image of Neeta's childhood in her room evoked the need of an excursion to the mountains in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* too. Her desire to go to the mountains was fulfilled, by dying in Nature's bosom. In *Subarnarekha* and *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo* Ghatak, however, would employ the practice of "outings" as a means to explore his philosophical ideas on journey. In the context of this film, the act of travelling practically serves as musical excursions. All the musical compositions performed in Lalgola, Kurseong, Bolpur, and Budge Budge exclusively consist of music (Rabindrasangeet/Tagore songs). The group of theatre artists literally appears to be departing from the urban space in pursuit of musical excursions, serving multiple spatial aesthetic functions in the film.

On a visit to Lalgola, a town near the Padma River in Murshidabad, for a performance, Nireeksha (the group's name) members listen to traditional boatmen's songs linked with the river and see boats speeding across it. Bhrigu and Anasuya trade childhood memories of loss and separation about how their parents were abducted from them by the communal violence of the Partition until they come to share a sense of trust and dependence. Bhrigu finds Anasuya engaged to Samar, an engineer returning to Calcutta following years of overseas travel. However, the journey from urban confines to the tranquil banks of the Padma River serves as a metaphorical pilgrimage, accentuated by the melodic cadence, and emotive interactions of Bhrigu and Anasuya. This excursion invites us to unravel the aesthetics woven into the fabric of the narrative, where the landscape becomes a stage, with music being the guide.

For the excursion Bhrigu's team commences their journey on a bus, accompanied by the props and lighting equipments of their team. As they embark, they engage in a melodious rendition of the song "*Eso mukto karo, andhokarer ei dwar*" (Come, break the gate of the

darkness), composed by Jyotirindra Maitra, the music director of the film. The commencement of each successive song occurs only upon arrival at the destination. The specific details of the play being performed by them are not disclosed. However, a form of performance permeates the entire scene, evoking a sense that the whole space itself serves as a stage. Ghatak's camera further enhances the space, while the characters exhibit palpable enthusiasm in response to the newfound sense of freedom in the expansive outdoor setting far from the urban space. Ghatak's shooting and editing techniques undergo fluctuations, leading to the emergence of a complex pattern. This is the sublime landscape for Ghatak, a rural tranquil space, especially with a river, where his characters always find solace. It will finally come out in perfection in *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam*.

Anasuya's hand touches Bhrigu's there for the first time in the film. It exhibits a heightened state of excitement triggered by the mere sensation of Padma's gentle breeze. The line "*Aaij hoibo Sitar biya*" (Today Seeta's marriage will happen) is audibly perceived, constituting a line within the musical composition, accompanied by the *uludhwani*. The chorus demonstrates patience throughout the film, culminating in a moment where they sing a wedding song. It symbolizes the joining of hands and offering collective prayers for the union of the two Bengals. This union represents the convergence of the divided theatre movement of IPTA, disguised as the coming together of the two main characters. In the concluding moments of the film, as the prayer nears its realization, the two individuals would clasp hands while positioned upon a bustling railway track that differs from the "minus sign" configuration of the railway track found at Lalgola.

Following a brief interval, a succession of musical compositions ensues. The male members of the group sing with great intensity, situated along the banks of the river. In the song

"*Dohai aali*" (Have Mercy on us dear Lord), there is a notable departure from the chorus and the background space assumes its usual prominence in Ghatak's films. During this segment, the volume of the lyrics undergoes variation, as a collective voice beseeches for respite from the anguish, assuming the role of the narrator. The atmosphere becomes illuminated and resonates with melodic sounds. The organization of the *mise-en-scène* consists of the surrounding space and the characters into three distinct groups, facilitating the transitions between each group. Gagan and Banshi proceed to sit on the bank (*char*) of Jagna river, while Rishi, Shibu, Jaya, and other individuals engage in boating activities. Anasuya and Bhrigu, on the other hand, seek solitude in a tranquil place.

As the musical compositions gradually diminish in volume, the soundscape is succeeded by the melodic rendition of Gagan's *bhatiali* song, "*Epar Padma opar Padma maidhye Jagnar char*" (The River Padma on both sides, the sandbank in the middle) Gagan engages in vocal expression while positioned on the *char* of Jagna. The director's inclination, acquired from the artistic influences of Eisenstein and Brecht, is evident in the auditory landscape present within all of his cinematic works. Individuals engage in vocal expressions such as singing, reciting, and expressing sorrow, while simultaneously synchronizing their movements with the rhythmic utterance of the phrase "*ho ho*." They form a chorus. The song that Gagan sings exhibits not only a lyrical content that serves to awaken us as listeners, but also demonstrate a profound sense of introspection through the melodic composition and vocal delivery in the landscape.

Once more, the auditory presence of a conch shell, *uludhwani*, and bell resonates, as we find Bhrigu and Anasuya positioned at the end of the railway track. The recurring auditory stimulus is the wedding song, "*Aamer tolay jhamur jhumur*" (It is untranslatable, basically talking about a typical Bengali wedding scene) Regarding the use of marriage songs in the film

Ghatak said, "The main theme of my *Komal Gandhar* was the union of the two Bengals, so various ancient tunes of marriage keep playing, even in scenes of extreme disharmony, the tune of union continues to play" ("*Komal Gandhar* Prasonge Porichaloker Kichhu Boktobbo" 75). The camera shifts its focus towards the male individuals who are rowing the boats on the river. They vocalize the lyrics of "*Dohai aali*." Gagan provides encouragement raising both of his hands. The camera subsequently returns to Bhrigu and Anasuya. They confront the current state of the Padma River. In front of their imaginative eyes the domicile across the river where their parents lived before the Partition unfolds. The river earlier used to connect the two sides of it with ferries. Now, after the Partition, the other side of the river is a foreign land. Though the two individuals share a common origin on the opposing side of it, though they originated from the same household and shared a common upbringing,[52] they cannot go there anymore even if they wish.

Ghatak employed his heightened awareness of the landscape to augment the narrative. Hence, a recurring motif can be observed in the compositions of *Ajantrik*, where, during moments of crisis, the characters assume a secondary role within the frame. Ghatak further said, "The point I have tried to make in my *Ajantrik*, *Komal Gandhar* and *Subarnarekha* is basically the same" ("*Komal Gandhar* Prasonge Porichaloker Kichhu Boktobbo" 75). The visual field is dominated by the earth, the sky, or the tree; the character is not an anchor in the image. They are deliberately positioned at the periphery, with only a fragment of their bodies visible, while the majority of the frame is occupied by the surrounding landscape. As Biswas points out, "At crucial moments the human figure is pushed to the corners or the margins of the frame, giving

[52] This formula permeates throughout the entirety of the director's filmography, exhibiting a profound brother-sister relationship. See Moinak Biswas' Her Mother's Son: Kinship and History in Ritwik Ghatak.

rise to extreme fragmentation of the body and leaving the expanse of the frame to the reign of non-human space (221). In the context of the Lalgola of this film too, Bhrigu and Anasuya find themselves overshadowed by the encompassing landscape. Now, it is not the end. We see a more philosophical angle in it. They are also overshadowed by the *abhed ākāśa* (the indivisible space)[53] as if it says: who are we to divide a country? Who are we to create borders? Who are we to divide people?

Ghatak uses the idea of the sky (ākāśa) in his film as a philosophical and symbolic element that connects with the Indian concept of *abhed ākāśa*—the indivisible or universal space, linked with unity, vastness, and transcendence. He combines the fragmented Bengal, suffering life of the characters with expansive views of the sky to suggest the infinite. Ghatak said:

> Along with politics I thought about philosophy and Indian tradition. The ancient Indian life is a great theme for new pictures. I am now deeply engrossed in it and so shall I be so long as I remain on this side of the grave. The plain reality is that a film as such provides me food. So long as I get the opportunities for showing pictures, I shall work for this art and thus keep away the wolf from the door... I am very much fascinated by the old Indian tradition, mainly by the Rigveda, the Samhita, the Bramhana, the Aranyaka, the whole of

[53] The idea of *abhed ākāśa*, meaning undifferentiated space or non-dual space, has roots in Indian philosophy in Vedanta. It is associated with *Adwaita* (non-duality), where the ultimate reality *Brahmana* is considered indivisible. *Akāśa* (space) is seen as an infinity that holds everything in unity, beyond any division. See *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* for explanations of key texts in Indian philosophy, Upanishadic and Vedantic discussions on the nature of space.

> Sruti, the Upanishada. The Smriti, the Purana, the Mahakavyas. ("Interview With Ritwik Ghatak" 102)

Ghatak arouse a yearning for integration into a larger whole by contrasting spatio-political fragility with the expanse of the sky. This captures the *abhed ākāśa* philosophy, in which the sky reminds us of the connectivity of all life despite seeming divisions. Deeply anchored in the trauma of the Partition, Ghatak's film investigates ideas of dislocation and identity. In their indivisibility, the space becomes a visual metaphor for the pure homeland and culture—a sharp contrast to the fractured lives that the characters lead. The use of the sky also fits Indian aesthetics and relates to the idea of the sublime. We are drawn into a space that is both external and internal—a quality mirroring the *abhed ākāśa*, where personal and universal dissolve into one—the vastness of the sky evokes awe. Making the human figures seem small, Ghatak emphasizes the immensity of the sky using wide views, stressing their fragility against the cosmic background. He combines images of the sky with expressive sounds—the song "Dohai aali"—to accentuate their meditative aspect. Beyond only a visual component, thus, the sky serve as a philosophical emblem supporting his idea of unity, transcendence, and the human yearning for the indivisible among the fragmentation due to the Partition.

As daylight wanes, the boats gradually make their way back to the shore, and the tempo of the music gradually decelerates. The camera returns to Jagna's *char*. Another rendition of *bhatiali*, performed by Ranen Roy Chowdhury, showcases Gagan's melancholic face and gentle vocal delivery. The musical composition descends upon the characters Bhrigu and Anasuya during their final scene. During the moment when they express their affection, the camera observes not only Shibu, but the entirety of the surrounding landscape. The conversation is perceived in a hushed tone. Neeta's last words in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* mingled with the

mountains, Seeta and Abhiram's first love utterances in *Subarnarekha* would mingle with the whispers in the forest. This kind of opening of words from inside to outside, this way of the person's speech rotting out into the landscape takes another form in *Ajantrik*. There the sound of Jagaddal's horn returns as a motif in the landscape (Biswas "Nisorgo O Natyalap" 107). When the *bhatiali* song from the chest of the river is mixing with the late afternoon breeze, the words of Anasuya also become indistinct in the landscape. Bhrigu averts his gaze from the narrative and assumes an upright posture, directing his sight forward. The camera captures a frontal view and pans across the bushes, which are observed to be in motion due to the influence of the wind. Then the camera proceeds in a forward direction across the railway track, which, as described by Bhrigu, has assumed a "minus sign." As the vocal ensemble reaches a crescendo, the camera abruptly shifts its focus to the buffer. For duration of eleven seconds, the film assumes a stationary position on the black screen to hammer the audience. Thus, Ghatak's entire effort of the excursion to make us confront the fragmentation due to the Partition becomes successful in the expansive canvas of the film.

Sarkar says:

> Ghatak imaginatively explores the possibility of overcoming loss and alienation through active engagement in the cultural sphere. If marriage is his privileged figure of union in this film, then, in locating the romantic duo within the sphere of cultural activism, he spurns the emergent model of autonomous couples largely dissociated from community and leads us back to the social. (202)

Anasuya and Bhrigu engage in a contemplative discussion on the historical event of the Partition, as they find themselves situated on the river bank adjacent to the abruptly terminated railway track. During their conversation, they reflect upon the profound impact of the Partition,

particularly the loss of the "*Nishchindi*" (Certainty) and *"Bhite Mati"* (Homeland) Bhrigu extends his index finger and proceeds to acquaint the audience with his former residence. The camera exhibits unconventional behaviour, traversing across an expansive and untamed expanse of land. According to Ghatak, there exists a similarity in the connection among the two lands, two countries. This refers to the amalgamation of the two Bengals. He was interested in facilitating a connection between the two.

In the vicinity of the river, Bhrigu finds himself contemplating the disclosure of his underlying anguish to Anasuya. At this juncture, he realizes that it remains opportune to perceive his own identity as interconnected with the encompassing landscape. The existence of Bangladesh as a separate political entity did not precede the Partition. This phenomenon persisted, even during the period when Bengal transitioned into an independent nation-state. This also extended to the opposite side of the region. It is worth noting that Ghatak developed a strong affection for the undivided "Bangladesh." The notion of Bangladesh became the sole focus in his thoughts. For Ghatak even "Shakuntala became Bangladesh to me" ("*Komal Gandhar* Prasonge Porichaloker Kichhu Boktobbo" 75). Once again, character becomes space.

The next excursions in the film also support the argument.

Aakash bhora surjotara, bishwabhora pran

Tahari majhkhane

Aami peyechhi, aami peyechhi mor sthan

Bismaye tai jage, jage aamar gaan...

(The sky is full of the sun and stars; the world is full of life

There in the midst of that

I got, I got my place

I wake up in wonder; my song also comes out...)

The theatre group's next outing is at Kurseong. So, in a long shot Ghatak captures clouds floating in the sky like cotton wools. Far away in a place like a hill, Rishi is singing the above song with the gesture of waving his hands. The camera pans and catches the vast mountains from those dunes. The song keeps on playing. Then camera pans again and captures Jaya. She is sitting on the top of another hill. A long shot takes the mountains in the distance. A road can be seen below. Shibu is seen going through that road in the foreground. He passes through an arch on the road. Camera pans to Shibu, as he walks. Rishi is on one side of the frame, and the Nature pervades the rest of the frame. Rishi begins to sing with outstretched hands. Rishi re-enters the frame from the left, marching up the mountain path and singing the song. Camera pans to capture the vast mountains. Rishi comes back into the frame. He moves towards the camera in a close shot position and again goes out of frame again. Another long shot captures the mountain, quickly panning over the trees. Camera pans to Rishi as he continues to sing. Rishi is in the foreground, hill range in distance. Camera tilts up, and then pans to the mountain sky, and then a close-shot of Rishi with his singing expression. In a long shot the mountain road is gone ahead. On the left of the frame, Anasuya is seen sitting under an arch. Rishi's song can be heard. As the camera leaves the road and pans to the left, settling and composing Anasuya. Jaya enters the frame. She places her hand on a part of the gate of the house under the arch and looks at Anasuya. Anasuya completes Rishi's lyrics: "*bismaye tai jaage amar gaan...*"Then the camera pans further and captures the hills in front of the house. Clouds are floating on the Himalayas.

Bhrigu and Shibu sit on a railing. A train can be seen passing below. Rishi's voice is suddenly heard from behind. He calls Bhrigu. In a composite long shot Rishi is facing the camera. Back-to-camera we find Shibu and Bhrigu. They both turn to look at him. Rishi says, "Did you see the Bangladesh plane?" The camera pans to a close up of a running Rishi. He turns his back to the camera. Rishi looks at the hill and says: "If there is not even a cloud, it seems to be smiling sweetly. Like a little green girl lying silent...." Bhrigu stands alone on a plain looking at the mountains. Camera pans from left to right. It captures the top of a hill leaving Bhrigu.

As Bhrigu and Anasuya stroll across the barren sandy terrain, Anasuya talks of her mother. She hands Bhrigu her mother's diary. This long shot takes place in the *khoai* (barren land) near Santiniketan in Birbhum. Bhrigu is seen walking there. Anasuya is standing at a place in *khoai*. She rummages through the shoulder bag and puts it inside. Then she hurries downstairs. Ghatak's camera pans to catch her going. Bhrigu is seen coming from the other side. Bhrigu enters from the left side of the frame. Anasuya is on the right. To the left of the frame Bhrigu's "serious" face can be seen. The rest of the frame is occupied by the high and low vast wilderness. A tree is in the distance. Behind is the wilderness of *khoai*. A faint smile is on her face. The smile disappears. Anasuya raises her eyes and looks down again. The air whistle blows. Next Bhrigu and Anasuya are standing on the road of *khoai*. Anasuya's face is close-to-camera. Anasuya says— "I had a very important talk with you." Saying this she looks back at Bhrigu and says, "Let's walk." Anasuya gives the diary to Bhrigu. Bhrigu takes the diary and looks at it holding it on his chest with one hand. He approaches the camera. "I have named *Komal Gandhar,* in my mind. A poem by Rabindranath. Description of a girl. A girl like a pitiful sweet melody in the midst of many storms around." Anasuya from behind says, "Just like our Bangladesh. She is just like a girl." Thus, Ghatak compares Bengal witha tender girl. Bhrigu,

alone, finishes the series reading Anasuya's mother's diary while standing close to a sandy ravine. Let us recall Ghatak's perspectives here:

> Tagore wrote a poem - *Naam Rekhchhi Komal Gandhar Mone Mone*. Tagore said to Bishnu Dey in Barrackpore once that he saw his eyes and said that he was sitting like a *komal gandhar*. Bishnu Dey published a book of poems many years later called *Komal Gandhar*. That one description of Tagore, a melancholic sixteenth sitting looking at the window – Bishnu-*Babu* equated him with the whole of Bangladesh. But my Bengal is a broken Bengal. So I had to go one step further. ("*Komal Gandhar* Prasonge Porichaloker Kichhu Boktobbo" 76)

Camera pans over the ditch. Then comes and settles there on an autumn bush. A hand can be seen in the close hold the other hand. Anasuya's hand is holding Bhrigu's. Later Bhrigu looks at the pages of the diary. Tears stream down his eyes. He stops for a while and starts walking. The camera follows him. He is in front of the long leaves of the bush. The leaves move in the wind. Anasuya exits the frame. Camera settles on the moving leaves. The leaves move against the backdrop of the sky. Bhrigu is captured at the top angle. One side of him is visible. He closes the diary standing there. This is where the final phrases—"*Ek houk...hey Bhagaban*" (God, let them together) overlap. Bhrigu leans over the diary with emotion. Then gradually turns towards the beautiful natural terrain of the *khoai* towards the stream below.

Bhrigu draws a parallel for Anasuya between the drama Shakuntala[54] and the tensions of Calcutta during the last rehearsals. He compares the pet deer in the drama tugging at

[54] At the end of the play in a small town in Birbhum, an old lower caste woman, moved by Bhrigu's performance, gives him a medal received by her son for singing. Her son, like those portrayed in Bhrigu's play, died in the Great Bengal Famine of 1943-44. Bhrigu is overwhelmed by the old woman's gesture, for she reminds him of his mother.

Shakuntala's sari to a begging child on Calcutta streets seeking alms. As Sarkar points out, "Ghatak's unrelenting engagement with history takes remarkably eclectic forms. Making classical Sanskrit literary allusions jostle with Marxist thought, placing Tagore and Shakespeare side by side, he brings various cultural archives—regional, national, civilizational, global—into creative dialogue, helping to shape an Indian intellectual modernity" (207). Anasuya is walking fast. Camera pans with her. A light falls on one side of Anasuya's face. She falls on the road. Part of the screen is black. The child's cry "*ei didi, dena dena*" (Didi, please give me something) is heard. The light has come to some part of the frame. The street child enters the frame. His feet are visible first in the illuminated part. Then his little body comes full frame. He is running behind Anasuya. Camera pans with him. The child is running saying "*ei didi, ei didi*." The screen goes black. A toy car is on a shadowy yet lighted part of the road. A rope is tied to it. The street child pulls it. The toy car turns upside down. Then it turns to one side. At the same time the sound of firing is heard. Sometimes the toy comes into the light and sometimes it goes through an almost dark area. Camera pans around the toy car for about ten seconds. Anasuya finally enters the house with trembling feet. The street child's voice is still heard. Anasuya enters the room and quickly pushes the door. Inside the room, Anasuya's elder brother Pakhi is next to the stairs. Anasuya says, "Dada, I—I suddenly realized today; I thought it was impossible."[55]

[55] "Use your emotion, it shouldn't be a problem for a Bengali girl - go back to 1947 - when you had to leave your home or why don't you imagine this Calcutta as your hermitage?" Bhrigu tells Anasuya. Look at the procession; that is your fawn, your creeper. Imagine a beggar child pleading alms exactly like that fawn. Would everything circle your feet like a creeper if you had to leave Calcutta, this Bengal permanently?" The shot of a procession marks Bhrigu's conversation. This emphasizes Anasuya's problem even more since contemporizes Kālidāsa's work. The intertext of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* in this sequence alludes to the later, unexpected fragmentation and conveys the agony of having to leave one's home and people. Anasuya, the modern Shakuntala, considers her dilemma and ultimately chooses not to leave her own country, in contrast to Shakuntala, who had chosen to leave, leaving the creeper and the fawn.

Bhrigu loses nothing of his enthusiasm for a new language for the theatre; Anasuya supports and inspires him instead. Anasuya to take a decision turns up at last-minute to join Bhrigu's group setting off on a new rural tour. Rishi confesses his love for Jaya, who is only too delighted to welcome him. In quiet respect of their now restored love and friendship, Bhrigu and Anasuya clasp hands. With a number of IPTA veterans like Bijan Bhattacharya and Debabrata Biswas playing their roles, the group's elderly members gently cheer them on. Ghatak revisits all the landscapes used in the film again in the end. In this regard, Ghatak said:

> ...Wedding songs are profusely scattered throughout *Komal Gandhar*. I desire a reunion of the two Bengals. Hence the film is replete with songs of union. When the camera suddenly comes to a halt at the dead end of a railway track, where the old road to eastern Bengal has been snapped off, it raises (towards the close of the film) a searing scream in Anasuya's heart. ("My Films" 51-52)

In the film's final sequence, the camera pans left and right for a long time while the music flows at the level of the images. This is followed by another lengthy pan to the left of the frame. Bengal's beauty is emphasized in this descriptive syntagma. In order to position the city space against the empty sky, the pan eventually gives way to a tilt-up. It signifies a reunification of spaces, especially when combined with the picture of the two Bengals' united hands, which stand in for the film's main theme of unity. Ghatak, as Awwal puts it, "conveys his thesis-statement by employing a dialectical coexistence of visual space and auditory elements, without relying on a

conventional narrative structure" (87). The film exhibits a multi-layered[56] and essayistic structure that can be characterized as synthetic. The co-ordination of space and soundscape is commonly observed to occur in a neutral manner, rather than in a sequential order with respect to one another. Within his philosophy being considered, the ideas of separation and union, which represent opposing forces, are perpetually engaged in a state of tension. The visual dimensional structure reflects the concept of separation, while simultaneously expressing the desire for union through the sonorous spaces.

III.Fragmented space as dystopia

In *Subarnarekha*, the auteur presents the Partition as a cataclysmic event for Bengal. The refugees want resettlement, rehabilitation in a new "home." They even go to build a "Nabajiban Colony" (literally meaning new life) to jointly struggle for "rehabilitation." It becomes a trial for a whole community's rehabilitation. But it fails. How the whole of Bengal through the filmed spaces becomes a dystopia for the post-Partition Bengalis, we shall uncover that in this section. It also claims the phenomenon that when a people, their society, their country is divided; it no longer remains a utopia.

In this film, we find the victims of the Partition, their existential crisis, and their attempts to relocate throughout. In the filmmaker's view, the Partition obliterated the utopia of Bengal. It is a waste land now. The landlords, opportunists, deserters and caste issues plague the new refugee settlements in the outskirts of Calcutta. The haunting spectre of the Partition is

[56] Ghatak himself claimed that it is a multi-layered film. He said, "I wanted to draw together Anasuya's ambivalent mind, the ambivalent leadership of Bengal's IPTA movement and the anguish of an ambivalently divided Bengali nation" (142). See *Chalachchitra, manush ebang aaro kichhu*.

perpetually present in both the dialogues and the landscapes. The dejected men immerse themselves in the vices of hedonistic pleasure in the city. Sisters become prostitutes of the slum in Calcutta, and brothers become their clients. They seek resettlement, rehabilitation in a new "home." But it remains elusive and unachievable. They are never permitted to be domiciled anywhere. The visual landscape of despair and dislocation captures the dystopian essence of the post-Partition fragmented Bengal. Each space – the representative Nabajiban colony, the outskirts of the iron foundry of Chhatimpur, an abandoned airfield built during the World War II on the banks of the Subarnarekha River in Chhotonagpur, and the infernal city – becomes a reminder of the rupture caused by the Partition. They symbolize a world where the characters are trapped in a space that alienates them from their heritage, community, and humanity. The use of space communicates the dystopian impact of the fragmentation. It creates visuals of a homeland that has become unrecognizable and inhospitable.

Set on the outskirts of Calcutta in post-independence West Bengal, *Subarnarekha* chronicles early 1950s events. The first action occurs in a refugee colony, the newly set up Nabajiban Colony where Ishwar and his younger sister Seeta join the rest of the community in an effort at a fresh start. The colony members are opening a school at the beginning. Arriving at the colony they meet a boy-child named Abhiram and his mother. Abhiram's mother is suddenly kidnapped by some men of the landlord who owns the area the refugees have settled.[57] Ishwar

[57] Ghatak wrote his film script of *Sei Bishnupriya*, on a gang-raped woman who is subsequently killed. He juxtaposed it with Bishnupriya, the wife of Chaitanyadeb. Ghatak once again emphasizes the degeneration of the modern times by placing the present Bisnupriya in the historical Nabadwip context.

takes Seeta and Abhiram to Chhatimpur-Ghatshila to establish a new residence, even though his friend Haraprasad labels him as a deserter[58] of the colony.

A rich friend from college, Rambilas gives Ishwar a job in his iron foundry in Chhatimpur on the banks of the Subarnarekha River in Chhotonagpur. Ishwar is presented with a job opportunity by a friend who is a capitalist and owns a small-scale factory. This man also holds a religious affiliation and concurrently supports arts, particularly music. The phenomenon of civic art practice is, thus, being commoditised and marketed to a demographic lacking artistic sensibility.

Ghatak's personal philosophy gradually becomes apparent from the outset, as it is clearly articulated in spatial scope. Initially, the historical progression is observed in a fragmented manner, characterized by the gradual breakdown of a society divided into distinct factions. Upon disembarking from the train, the central character of the film is portrayed as a resolute and unwavering human being, exhibiting a poised facial expression as he gazes steadfastly towards the distant horizon. Adjacent to the protagonist, there are two children - his biological sibling Seeta, and a boy bereft of parental care. The shot presents a plausible opportunity for the development of companionship and potentially even affection between the two. These children represent the aspirations and potential of a forthcoming cohort in the dystopian space.

Abruptly, an ominous *Kalimurti* emerges, obstructing Seeta's path.[59] Through this Ghatak used the *Mahakala* theme in the film to underline the hollow values of modern life rent

[58] In Ghatak's *Yeh Kyun* also, in the context of the Partition, people are portrayed as completely cut off from their culture and values and reduced to a religious identity that allows them to murder anyone, even their closest friends, without cause or remorse.

asunder from its moorings in the puranic tradition. Using *Mahakala* has the benefits in using of mythology in art. We shall see that later. On the banks of Subarnarekha, Ghatak saw an abandoned aerodrome covering a sizable area. Fascinated and lost among the wreckage of that aerodrome, a little boy and a little girl have been searching for their past. The two innocent beings would not know that behind the catastrophe hovering over them are several such ruins of aerodromes. While engaging with the narrative of Seeta from the *Ramayana*, we observe the film's Seeta dissolving into the landscape alongside the manager.[60]

Abhiram attempts to recall the name of his hometown only to discover that Bengal does not have a village bearing such name. "The hero of my novel is a boy who remembers his childhood vaguely," he tells Seeta in the *Salban* while recounting the plot of the book that he is writing. He recalls the name of his hometown, but Bengal does not have any village bearing such name. He simply recalls that their house once stood on the banks of a wide river. From his early

[59]Ghatk wrote, "One morning my younger daughter ran up to me to tell me how she had been scared by a *Bohurupee* who had suddenly appeared before her, while she was walking alone on a mud road in the fields, and had chased her in his horrible guise of Kali. In a flash I could see Seeta, the central character of my film, as a child of today, screaming out in panic, maybe in the same way, as she suddenly confronted Mahakala" (50). See My Films in *Rows and Rows of Fences.*

[60] The film employs Seeta as a direct intertext straight from the past. Following her terrifying encounter with the *bahurupee* in the aerodrome sequence, Seeta takes protection from the former manager. The manager starts narrating the Seeta story after hearing her name: "Once there was a king named Janaka in Mithlia. He discovered little Seeta in the ground one day while he was plowing. He got Seeta from there. And that Seeta came back to the planet one day. The planet split to provide her cover. That occurred rather later. The whole epic of *Ramayana* is in between." The myth of Seeta, including her birth from and return to the ground is discussed by the former manager. He promises to tell everything that exists between her birth and death at a later time. Subarnarekha actually bridges the gap by reinterpreting Seeta's life in the context of Bengal's division along post-Partition lines.

years, he has been wondering about his nationality. He recalls his mother, how they arrived at a packed station after a shivering train journey on a chilly evening. Abhiram's diligent commitment to his studies yields to no favourable outcomes. During his formative years, he experienced a carefree upbringing immersed in the embrace of expansive natural space. Subsequently, he engages in a nomadic pursuit.

The city is unavoidable in this film too. The city must be accepted. Driven to wed Abhiram, Seeta flees with him to Calcutta on her wedding night. But the elopement of Seeta-Abhiram does not constitute the same departure as Kanchan did in *Bari Theke Paliye*, as here the couple lacks a place that they can return to. Now living in a Calcutta slum, Seeta and Abhiram have to take care of their young son Binu. Abhiram learns to drive, and lands a job as a bus driver since his writings cannot help him to make a living. Seeta waits for Abhiram to get home from his driver's job in the Calcutta slum, but his bus has its technical glitches and he unintentionally kills a child. Abhiram is beaten/burnt to death by an enraged mob in a city of vengeance. Abhiram aspired to pursue a career in writing, yet he possessed awareness that the human condition would inevitably entail suffering. But Ghatak exhibits a lack of interest in engaging with that tragedy. Instead, he strategically incorporates the distressed sibling interaction in the city space.

Ishwar developes and feels a more profound sense of void within regarding his estrangement from Seeta. He tries to hang himself but his old friend Haraprasad interrupts. Haraprasad's starving wife killed herself earlier in the film (not shown but narrated). Now alone and depressed, Haraprasad aimlessly wanders over the Bengal countryside. In contrast, Ishwar has always been an unconscious observer of his inner self, which contributes to his development into an "exiled" man. Haraprasad makes a deliberate decision until he discovers that the system's

deceptive tactics have ruined it. Haraprasad chooses the path of "activism," and while upholding his principles, he disregards his family, which leads to his wife's suicide. He continues on the path of struggle until he comes to Ishwar, the "deserter" whom he had previously rejected. Ishwar is on the verge of suicide when he sees Haraprasad. This Haraprasad addresses himself negatively: "no, not me, but my ghost." Haraprasad develops an existential axis by the means of this remark. He can let his arrogance go. Seeing his condition, he says, "I had protested." "I now have knocked against a wall. It makes no difference whether you run away or protest, really." The two lost men choose to travel to Calcutta in order to sink themselves in the sins of the large city. In the scene in the pub, Upanishadic chants are juxtaposed against *La Dolce Vita*'s theme music.[61] When their night-long revery ends, Iswar and Haraprasad, ride a taxi down Calcutta's streets. As the two intoxicated friends are seen into the darkness, the spiritual demise of the city keeps coming through upanishadic quotes into a magnificent nocturnal collage. "Haven't seen the atom bomb" we hear on the haze of streetlights crossing the screen. "Haven't. They haven't?" "Never."[62] Not seen the war, not seen the famine, not seen the riots, and not seen the Partition... useless..." Meanwhile, Seeta is driven to sing for male clients for money so she may support herself and her child. Ishwar, who is roaring drunk following the bar-hopping in Calcutta with Haraprasad, turns out to be Seeta's first customer. Stunned and afraid, Seeta slices herself

[61] In this regard Ghatak said, "The music that accompanies the scene of orgy at the end of *La Dolce Vita*, where Fellini lashes out at the decadence of the whole of Western civilization, is known as Patricia. I sought to make a similar statement in my *Subarnarekha* about my own land, this Bengal, so sparkling with intellect. So I used the same music in the bar scene, to make a suggestion" (76). See Sound in Cinema in *Rows and Rows of Fences*.

[62] He tracks his debt to the 1940s socialist political-cultural endeavour. The Bengal Famine, the split of India, Hindu-Muslim riots, and Independence marked the "40s." And it was also the decade of the Quit India movement, the naval mutiny, peasant rebellions, thousands of strikes, barricades on the street built by workers, students and common people. See Her Mother's Son: Kinship and History in Ritwik Ghatak by Moinak Biswas.

with a kitchen knife. A blood-spattered Ishwar sees the face of his dead sister and reels out of the room clutching the kitchen knife. Thus, Ishwar and Seeta encounter each other, serving as a symbolic representation of their shared circumstances. The consequences of the Partition compel Seeta, a sister, to engage in prostitution, while Ishwar, a brother becomes a customer of sister's service. Its primary objective is to shed light on the hardships faced by individuals striving to preserve their dignity amidst socio-economic constraints of the post-Partition Bengal. Upon his release from incarceration, Ishwar addresses a journalist, inquiring, "Have you arrived with the intention of enjoyment?" For Ghatak, No one was able to avoid the catastrophe. All were responsible for it.

The urban locality in which Seeta and Abhiram establish their residence does not correspond to their actual home. What is the location of their real home? Seeta performs the Tagore song "*Dhaner khete roudra-chhayay lukochuri khela*" to Binu (Binu also sings later). Their actual residence is located in close proximity to the rice field. The sublime rural space, the "utopia" of Ghatak's imagination, is the potential substitute for an urban space. What is the nature of the contribution made by the city of Calcutta to Seeta? Only the caste-ridden hinterland of Ishwar is not effective in the urban space. The urban space subjects its inhabitants to the indignity of living in impoverished conditions. Abhiram's employment and subsequent demise is crafted by Ghatak with a sense of finality and obligation. The occurrence of this death is contingent upon the presence of the city. A human life is tragically terminated due to modern mechanical malfunction, orchestrated by the unsympathetic urban populace.

Ghatak's characters want to reject city again and again. It is as if Ghatak wanted to keep his citizens away from the city carefully. It is ironic too, that the city, in which he composed all his works of art, is often identified in his creations as the assassin. According to Basuroy,

Ghatak's Calcutta-*darshan* was completed in the film (84). He takes us to Calcutta's city space two times in the film. Calcutta's potential to emulate the grandeur of Rome or Paris is hindered by the burden of overseeing an incomplete and fragmented bourgeois development, as well as grappling with the enduring consequences of imperialism. Ghatak's lack of sympathy towards imperfections resulted in his characters being unable to attain citizenship. Despite having resided in this urban space for an extended period, it appears that Ghatak himself was unable to acclimate to the urban lifestyle. It appears that he maintained a sense of detachment and alienation within the city space. A distance ensues between the films and their creator, enabling the artist to engage in self-critique of his own creations. Upon watching Ghatak's films, it becomes evident that he frequently establishes an emotional connection with his characters. The filmmaker demonstrates empathy and solidarity with the characters, sharing in their anguish. He does not maintain an objective perspective when observing the characters and their predicaments; rather, he becomes emotionally invested in their experiences in the city. Their crisis serves as a mirror for his own struggles.[63]

> We were born into a critical age. In our boyhood we have seen a Bengal, whole and glorious. Rabindranath, with his towering genius, was at the height of his literary creativity, while Bengali literature was experiencing a fresh blossoming with the works of the Kallol group, and the national movement had spread wide and deep into schools and colleges and the spirit of the youth. Rural Bengal, still revelling in its fairy tales, panchalis, and its thirteen festivals in twelve months, throbbed with the hope of a new spurt of life...Our dreams faded away. We crashed on our faces, clinging to a crumbling

[63] He also talks about the lost Bengal in terms of his childhood, and home in his lyrical reminiscences in Chhabi Kora in *Chitrabikshan* (35), issue 1-2 of 1984.

> Bengal, divested of all its glory. What a Bengal remained, with poverty and immorality as our daily companions, with blackmarketeers and dishonest politicians ruling the roost, and men doomed to horror and misery! (Ghatak "My Films" 49).

So, Ishwar and his sister Seeta are uprooted from their East Bengali ancestral country because of the Partition. Their forced migration reflects the experiences of millions who lost their houses, identities, and community. Emphasizing the dystopian sense of post-Partition Bengal, the refugee camps where they first seek shelter capture the hopelessness and dehumanization experienced by the displaced. Ishwar yearns for the pastoral homeland they left behind, while his attempt to start a new life as a factory manager and to fit into the industrialized, urban space contrasts with the socio-economic effects of the Partition. Ishwar's inability to give Seeta and Abhiram a stable life reflects the systematic inequalities and exploitation experienced by refugees, the dystopian fallout of the Partition. Ghatak metaphorically depicts the collective suffering of Bengal using the personal tragedies of Ishwar, Seeta and Abhiram. A terrible reflection on the moral and social collapse of a fragmented nation, Seeta, metaphor of the post-Partition Bengal, plunges into prostititution, and finally to suicide. Likewise, the sad destiny of such a dalit character as Abhiram emphasizes on the dystopian reality of the post-Partition Bengal at the crucial juncture of caste, class, and displacement. The titular river represents continuity as well as an ironic reminder of the fragmented lives of the people.

Rajadhakshya writes:

> The environment of the new house is one of violent contradictions...romanticism clashes with the harshness of the foundry outlines as its machines emphasise a very different reality. But even more than this is the new playground of the children: a deserted airstrip and the debris of an airplane, both relicts of the Second World War. (100)

For Rajadhakshya, ancient myth triumphs over modern myth when the elderly manager recounts to little Seeta the heroic exploits of her namesake from the epic *Ramayana*. The original legend concerning Seeta, the Earth's daughter, who returns to her mother's womb, is recalled. The depiction of Nature's consistent reaction to Seeta's song is later extended to the desolate airstrip, where she sits amidst an ominous atmosphere, one with the landscape[64] (Rajadhyaksha 98–115). Unlike Rajadhyaksha, Dhruba Gupta argues, "No matter how much the baby cries 'Seeta maa, Seeta maa,' or by placing Seeta on the runway, it is not the entryway of Ghatak into the world of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*." For him, *The Golden Line* is precisely the anguished chronicle of post-independence Bengal ("Subarnarekha" 70–77). It is mixed with fear, lamentation, broken dreams and longing to dream of a "new home." Biren Dassharma also thinks:

> Ghatak did not try to match the story of *Subarnarekha* with the story of *Ramayana* - although the shadow of the epic came in various places. At one point of the *Subarnarekha* story, Ishwar says, 'What happened between 42 and 47?' - This is like a new *Saptakanda Ramayana* - here also Sita is like a symbol of an era. (89)

Through Seeta's self-immolation, an epic tale of deprivation and sacrifice unfolds, depicting the many lives of the refugees. It is obvious that Ghatak wanted to give it an epic dimension. There is a sense of history at work behind this desire—he wanted to make that history epic, just like the *Ramayana*. According to Bani Basu, further, what sets Ghatak apart from Ray and Sen, "is his

[64] Ghatak mentioned, "I made a totally different use of the camera in *Subarnarekha*, where for ninety percent of the extent of the film, I used universal focus, so that everything from the horizon to Seeta's face extremely foregrounded appears almost always clearly, sharply defined, to bring into focus Seeta's bitter wrath and fury" (66). He also mentioned, "I would say that it is the 18 mm that is my favourite lens. I have used it in almost all my films, but in *Subarnarekha* the most; the reasons being the advantage of achieving a universal focus, and the scope of bringing the materials themselves to a firm gesture" (72). See Two Aspects in *Rows and Rows of Fences*.

passion, his anger." She finds the angry, frustrated, anxious, disorganized people in the refugee-colony of Ghatak's films. Ghatak had "the dream of undivided Bengal, which is being destroyed in fragmented Bengal" (75–77). At that time, self-interests in people were turning them into deserters.

For Ghatak, the human race is refugee. This is a universal phenomenon. The dream of a house remains forever in human beings. This can also be the horizon of the new life of a community, of a nation. The film's language effectively communicates these meanings. Ghatak himself said:

> On the direct level, the crisis presented in *Subarnarekha* is based on the refugee problem. But "refugees" or "*bastuharas*" in this film do not only refer to the refugees of East Bengal - with the help of the word I want to convey a different resonance. In our day we are all refugees - this is also my point. It is my intention to raise the word "*bastuhara*" from a special geographical level to a universal one. In the dialogue of Haraprasad's mouth in the film, 'we are *bayubhuto, niralamba*' or, in the mouth of a press worker at the very beginning of the film, 'Refugee! Who is not a refugee?' That is what is indicated in these words. (50)

Ghatak also says, "the landscape, hopefully indicate that" (51). Keeping in mind the above line from Ghatak himself, the comprehensibility of the film's meanings then becomes quite apparent. The layers of the film are not interconnected in a random manner. The characters appear to be confined within a space.

The issue of refugees in the film is depicted in multiple dimensions. Firstly, it is portrayed on a personal level through the experiences of the film's protagonists. Secondly, it is

presented in a collective and historical context, as evidenced by the film's introductory scenes. Further, the social implications of the refugee problem are depicted through the ongoing interaction between society and the individual. Lastly, the film delves into the philosophical aspect of the issue, exploring the quest for self-discovery within oneself. The interconnectedness of these perspectives is such that it is inconceivable to devise a resolution to the issue in their absences. Each successive action undertaken by the main characters serves as a manifestation of their individual seclusion, the seclusion experienced by the family both literally and metaphorically, and the broader seclusion experienced by humanity as a whole. In order to get out of a mere film sequence, we have to make all kinds of connivance; this film coincides with that claim.

> *Subarnarekha* seems endless. Every time I see it, I see from a small backyard to a city road, from a railway station to an airport, from a garden fence to a *shal* forest—through all these dimensions, the film is trying to cover the universe, looking for history from the circle of small time, looking for history to reach even bigger - the vast time. If only one forward motion, a sequence of characters or events, had been observed, these increasingly cosmic circles would probably not have been created. (Biswas "Yatir Binyas" 78)

The film borrows from the English Chronicle Play in its structure, Bertolt Brecht in principles of representation and Upanishadic imagination with regard to the perception of life. Tagore is cited frequently in it. [65]This recombination is unencumbered by the fear of loss of authenticity that we

[65] Ghatak becomes a modernist, but not in the traditional sense, according to his use of several conventions in narrative transition. He uses three distinct techniques to combine historical time with linear narrative. He employs "scrolls," a basic method taken from English chronicle plays to show the passage of linear time in the characters'

find in the identity-based approaches to culture. According to Parichay Patra, on the other hand, *Subarnarekha* begins with a promise of a new nation and ends with a mythical "new home." Both were unachievable, and the extent of disillusionment distinguishes the second from the first. The original promise becomes increasingly unattainable throughout the film, culminating in a transformation at the end (99). The film indeed explores the elusive promise of a "new home." Abhiram and Seeta, two children, are positioned against a backdrop of rusted World War II aircraft, symbolizing the magnitude of the past. The journey of the children intersects with the spectre of war and the lasting effect it has on Ghatak's psyche. Throughout the course of the film, the initial promise of a new nation and a new home becomes increasingly unattainable. The motif of a "new home" persists, symbolizing a utopian ideal ultimately shattered by oppression and violence of the Partition. Ghatak combines historical events, such as the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, with personal narratives to create a meta-narrative of history. The vision of Ghatak reflects a post-apocalyptic space after the devastating Partition.

So, Ghatak depicts the dystopia of fragmented spaces, using spatiality to critique the socio-political and existential ruptures caused by the Partition. He reveals how fragmented spaces alienate individuals, dismantle communities, and fracture identities, mirroring the

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lives in *The Golden Line*. Coincidences and insertions of mythic characters, verses, words and phrases lifted straight from the *Upanishads*, *Sishutirtha*, a poem by Rabindranath Tagore, and the words spoken by Mahatma Gandhi at the moment of his death help the scrolls break out the narrative into three episodes and engage with historical time. One such instance is "Hey Ram." He further said, "*Subarnarekha* is not a flawless film. The story chosen was screamingly melodramatic. I have joined the different phases of the narrative, one to another, to make it a story of fateful coincidences. There are several novels that offer parallels for such plotting, e.g. *Gora* or *Naukdubi* or *Shesher Kabita*, all by Rabindranath, where the author is not concerned exclusively with telling a story but more concerned with attitudes as they evolved with the events. Such coincidences, even if they occasionally appear incredible, would not really jar as long as there is a verisimilitude to it all" (51). See My Films in *Rowsand Rows of Fences.*

philosophical discourse on spatial dystopia. Space, as a lived and constructed reality, is central to human experience, shaping identity, community, and purpose. However, the fragmentation of space—be it physical, social, or psychological—signals a disruption in the coherence that binds these elements. Fragmented space, marked by divisions, alienation, and the absence of collective meaning, manifests as a dystopia. Fragmentation becomes a spatial reflection of societal disintegration and existential dimensions of space. Fragmented space also disrupts the existential connection to place. Fragmented space, by contrast, is transient and placeless, denying individuals the ability to root themselves in their surroundings. The loss of belonging and coherence renders fragmented space a site of existential despair. Refugee camps, segregated neighbourhoods, and urban slums expose the violence of spatial fragmentation. These spaces are dystopian not only in their material deprivation but also in their symbolic role as sites of marginalization and control. In Ghatak's cinematic Bengal, the fragmentation of space is explicitly linked to the Partition of Bengal, a historical event that divided not only land but also families, cultures, and identities. The attempts of the refugees in various spaces reflect the dislocation of the inhabitants—physically uprooted from their homeland and emotionally severed from their collective past. Ghatak compels us to confront the dystopian realities of fragmented spaces while also imagining possibilities for healing. So, Ishwar, Seeta, Abhiram with others regugees in the film make several attempts. The cycle of their life as refugees from East Bengal through West Bengal ultimately to the slums of Calcutta never finds the lost utopia. But Ghatak was never a pessimist:

Joy hok manusher, oi nabajatoker, chirojibiter

(Victory to people, to the newborn, to the eternal)

– Rabindranath Tagore (*Shishutirtho*/*Punashcho*)

At the end of the film, the above mentioned words from a Tagore poem float across the screen. At last, a confused and devastated Ishwar brings Binu to Chhatimpur in search of a new life and home.[66] This film is an exploration of the search for utopia within the confines of a dystopia. The film's title itself, a golden-hued river, serves as a metaphorical current coursing through the lives of its characters, mirroring the search for a utopia that seems elusive in a post-apocalyptic space. The search for utopia—a quest that is both personal and collective in the film provides a lens through which we are to understand the dystopia that Ghatak presents.

Conclusion

Ghatak has written movingly about the impact of Partition on his career:

> This was the world that was shattered by the War, the Famine, and when Congress and the Muslim League brought disaster to the country and tore it into two to snatch for a fragmented independence. Communal riots engulfed the country. The waters of the Ganga and the Padma flowed crimson with the blood of warring brothers. All this was part of the experience that happened around us...I have not been able to break loose from this theme in all the films I have made recently. What I have found most urgent is to present to the public eye the crumbling appearance of a divided Bengal to awaken the Bengalis to an awareness of their state and a concern for their past and future. As an artist

[66] The story of a teacher who loses his wife is told in Ghatak's story *Janmabhumi* too. He now has to take care of his young daughter. When the school teacher eventually departs the city for his village, he is humiliated there as well. He eventually departs his village in pursuit of a "home" with his daughter.

> I have tried to remain honest, and it is for the future to decide how far I have succeeded. (Ghatak "My Films" 49).

Sarkar says, "Ghatak stages a crisis of historical consciousness through his anachronistic allusions, and presents such a riven temporal sensibility as an ethicopolitical necessity" (207). And, the territory of Ghatak's films, especially in the Partition trilogy, with such "ethicopolitical necessity," becomes the post-Partition Bengal. It is imagined as many incarnations of the mother Goddess. The devastated mother she cries in pain: "*Aami bachte boro bhalobasi...aami bachte cheyechhilam*" (I love to live...I wanted to live). For him, the post-Partition Bengal is no more a "*Gorar Bangla*" (flourishing Bengal) of Tagore, Saratchandra etc., it is a "*Bhangar Bangla*" (broken Bengal) now. Moreover, Ghatak negated the city space. His characters always find solace in the village tranquillity. The physical landscapes in his films reflect the psychological and emotional landscapes of the characters, symbolizing the disarray and chaos unleashed by the subcontinent's division. Internal disintegration and conflict caused by the rupture of personal and cultural identities are depicted in his films. According to Sudeshna Chakravarti, Ghatak's works depict the fragmented self, torn between nostalgia and the harsh realities of the present (144). The blurring of past and present, home and exile, and dream and reality exacerbates a profound feeling of disorientation and displacement. The landscapes get infused with the characters' emotions. When the landscape is used to accentuate the emotion, it is done so violently that it can only be interpreted as the director's intervention.

Ghatak made *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* after nearly ten years of 'inaction.' Given that it is set in Bangladesh, a country with which he has a deep connection, Ghatak discovers another way to explore in this film, namely the life of a community, with all its joys, sorrows, and devastation, a life of a whole civilization, a sublime space.