

Genteel Aspirations: A Study of Uttam Kumar and the Image of the bhadralok through three of his Films

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Abstract

In 2018, Anandabazar Patrika, one of the most prominent Bengali dailies in operation, enlisted Uttam Kumar, one of the most prominent actors of Bengali cinema of post-Independence Bengal, as the benchmark of quintessential Bengali romantic (Mandal, 2018). Evidently, this particular image would have been impossible without Uttam Kumar being able to establish himself as the benchmark of the English-educated middle-class Bengali gentleman or bhadralok, who holds a revered place in the Bengali society. It is interesting to note that this particular image of Uttam Kumar has persisted despite his conscious attempts of repeated experimentation with characters, including that of a detective, a psychologist, a manservant and, very interestingly, what can be called a “cinematic self-critique” (Chowdhury, 2017) of himself. This essay will try to investigate into this particular bhadralok image that Uttam Kumar carries on to this date, even thirty-eight years after his death. This essay will try to analyse whether Uttam Kumar can be regarded as the bhadralok on screen. This will be done through textual analysis of three of his films – Harano Sur (1954), in which he essays the role of the amnesiac owner of a private firm, Lal Pathar (1964) in which he plays the role of a whimsical, self-obsessed feudal landlord and Nayak (1967) in which he performs the role of a star and thus becomes self-reflexive. In the process, other elements like how the bhadramahila complements his presence on screen as a bhadralok, as well as the questions that emerge with his rise as a star, shall also be taken into account.

Introduction

Jyoti: “Tell me what the movie has, except for you?”

Arindam: “I’m in it. Isn’t that enough?”

Jyoti: “Not enough, bhai. The times have changed.”

Above lines are from the film *Nayak* (1966) by Satyajit Ray. The film revolves around a star, Arindam Mukherjee, a role which was essayed by arguably the biggest star to have worked in Bengali cinema, Uttam Kumar, originally known as Arun Kumar Chatterjee. It is known that it was Uttam Kumar’s star status that had prompted Ray to choose him, despite consciously maintaining a distance with the mainstream Bengali and Hindi films at that time (Narayan, 2016). The lines are snippet taken from the conversation between a star and his manager. It is difficult to trace the presence of the educated, cultured, elite Bengali gentleman or *bhadralok* (this particular social identity has been defined in the next section of the paper) in this conversation. The conversation reflects depreciation in the “capital value” of a star, wherein the audience gradually turns their attention away from films that only bank upon the presence of a star (Hayward 2006). Evidently, Arindam’s manager, Jyoti, is hinting at the change in the fortunes of the star, wherein movies that only bank on the star figure do not fare well anymore in the box office. Though it is difficult to suggest the same for the real-life Uttam Kumar. His value as a star, it is reported, never diminished throughout his life, and “a mad following stalked him, distressed his free movements” (Chowdhury, 2017) till the year of his premature death (as has been remarked by a large section of Bengali film-goers and the Bengali film industry) in 1980. This has largely been characteristic of the film industries in India though, where the performance of a film on the box office has always been determined by the status of the star, which is a “crucial ingredient in the success of any mainstream film” (Thomas, 1991). It was the same man, who despite essaying multiple different roles throughout his life, would be portrayed by Bengali dailies as the benchmark of the archetypal *bhadralok* even after almost four decades of his demise.

In *Mahanayak* (2016), the biographical television series made on the life of Uttam Kumar by Birsa Dasgupta, the character that portrays him was premised on him being the ultimate Bengali *bhadralok* (Ray, 2016). This paper aims at comprehending the *bhadralok* status of Uttam Kumar, through an analysis of three of his films in which he plays three varying roles, *Harano Sur* (1957), *Lal Pathar* (1964) and *Nayak* (1966). In the first film, he plays the role of an amnesiac

owner of a private firm from an influential family in Kolkata, in the second film he plays the role of a whimsical feudal landlord while in the third film, he essentially mirrors his own self by essaying the role of a megastar. The paper aims to understand and analyse the social category of the bhadralok. The questions that will be posed about his identity as a bhadralok and his stardom, is something which this essay shall attempt to do through the textual analysis of the aforementioned films taking cognizance of their sociocultural contexts. Uttam Kumar shall be analysed as a star and how his stardom signifies certain cultural and ideological values.

The bhadralok and Uttam Kumar

Before analysing the films, it would be appropriate to define and understand the very concept of the bhadralok. The category of the bhadralok is a popular figure of Bengali literature. A product of nineteenth century Bengali Renaissance, considered to be a result of the impact of modern Western culture, the British rule and the advent of bourgeois economy in Bengal (Sarkar S. , 1979). The bhadralok was the result of this encounter, for which he was rational, critical and intelligent, as can be seen in the case of the famous Bengali detective Byomkesh Bakshi. The term, in general, claims Partha Chatterjee (1993a) means “respectable folk”, and is synonymous with middle class, literati, intelligentsia and in Marxist terminology, the petty bourgeoisie (Chatterjee 1993a, p.35). Swati Chattopadhyay (2005) claims that the bhadralok of colonial Calcutta of the nineteenth century was primarily defined by the respectability that accompanied “freedom from manual labour” (p.139), especially for men. The binary opposite of this bhadralok would be the chotolok, a term used to refer to the menial working classes. Even historian Sumit Sarkar (1998) concurs with this definition, and adds that it was the middle-class (madhyasreni, madhyabitta) in its own perception (Sarkar, 1997, p.169). Moreover, the class defined itself in relation to its lack of identification with the “superstitious ways of the uneducated masses” (Sarkar, 1997, p. 169). In fact, this particular class, which was essentially upper caste, could be identified by its affinity towards education and a lack of association with any sort of capitalistic enterprise (S. Sarkar, 1997). There was also “a virtually ubiquitous link with land in the form of petty zamindari, or more often, tenure holding” (Sarkar, 1997, p. 169). This framework largely persists till the present day, and the word has become synonymous with the average middle class Bengali male (Batabyal, 2005). It is this class that Partha Chatterjee (1993a) refers to as the “nationalist elite”, who had played a vital role in the formation of a national culture and social institutions that were infused with a spirit of nationalism.

The bhadralok, however, was not always middle class. Bengalis did taste success in entrepreneurship at the beginning of the nineteenth century, with multiple Calcutta based Bengali families incurring huge profits in businesses like shipping, mining, insurance and foreign trade (Sinha, 1995). By 1860s, the economic boom had ended and the end of the century saw Bengalis becoming a minority in Burrabazar, the principal trading hub of Calcutta (Sinha, 1995). To add to

this, there was a significant decline noticed in the fortunes of the Bengali rentier class due to a fall in revenue from the landholdings (Sinha, 1995). This was accompanied by a simultaneous shift towards professional employment (Sinha, 1995). This decline in property and shift to professional employment is what led to the feminization of the Bengali bhadralok, given that that masculinity in the colonial society was defined in accordance to the relationship of a man to his property, which had gradually declined amongst the Bengali middle class at the end of the nineteenth century (Sarkar, 1992). Therefore, the bhadralok came to be defined as feminine, and in opposition to the masculine British colonizer. The British man engaged in sports, hunting and other hobbies would be denotative of his masculinity, the Bengali man would be “effeminate, bookish, over-serious, languorous, lustful and lacking in self-discipline” (MacKenzie, 1995, p. vii).

This bhadralok, considered themselves as the cultural elite of the colonized Bengal played a major role in standardising the “chaste” form of Bengali language, which they would use to differentiate between themselves and the other sections of the Bengali society (Sinha, 1995, p. 24). G.P. Deshpande (2014) has in fact pointed out that the language of the bhadralok later did become the standard language of Bengal, without facing opposition from the other classes (Reddy, 2014, p. 88). Thus, and the dialect of the Bengali and its pronunciation would become an important marker of a bhadralok. It was the bhadralok again who was faced with what has been identified by Partha Chatterjee (1993b) as the “women’s question” (p.116), which essentially dealt with how to fashion the bhadramahila or the respectable woman. The categories of the world and the home, the dichotomy of the outer and the inner domain was formulated by nationalism had divided society into the material domain and the spiritual domain, which had been condensed furthermore into or (Chatterjee, 1993b). The world or the outer domain thus stood for material pursuits and was marked as that of the male’s, while the inner domain representing the spiritual self and true identity (Chatterjee, 1993b, p.120) was marked as that of the female’s. Therefore, the bhadramahila or the respectable woman was essentially created by the bhadralok, for which it can be posited that the former can complement the identity of the latter. The fact that all the three films being analysed have pivotal female characters would therefore prompt this paper to take a look into how and whether they live up to the ideals of the bhadramahila.

This bhadralok identity provides for an interesting case of exploration for Uttam Kumar, who in his initial days in the Bengali film industry was often chided for the lack of his bhadralokpedigree (Chowdhury, 2017). However, even three decades from his death, Uttam Kumar is widely remembered and portrayed as the ultimate bhadralok icon among the Bengalis. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine whether Uttam Kumar actually conformed to the very ideal of the bhadralok in his films, especially in the three films that have been chosen here from different points of his career. Analysis of *Lal Pathar* (1964) and *Nayak* (1966) are even

more interesting in light of the fact that Uttam Kumar had actually started experimenting with a wider variety of roles and characters by 1960s which often contradicted his established image of the romantic hero (Chowdhury, 2012). This particular question would also be explored in the light of the female characters who have starred alongside Uttam Kumar in these films, and how they contribute in his portrayal as the ideal bhadralok.

Harano Sur: Emergence of Uttam Kumar as the bhadralok

Harano Sur (1957), directed by Ajoy Kar, banks on the star couple of Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen. This star couple was casted for the first time in 1953 and continued as a popular pair well into the 1960s, was one of the biggest attractions of Bengali cinema, to the extent that their films can even be studied as a model for other such films that did not even star them (Biswas, 2000). The film portrays Uttam Kumar essaying the role of the protagonist, Alope Mukherjee, an amnesiac, who was rescued from the torturous confines of the mental hospital by one of its doctors, Roma, played by Suchitra Sen.

Roma takes Alope to her home away in the idyllic surroundings of her parental home in Palashpur, situated in what can be identified as the Santhal Parganas located in the extensions of the Eastern Ghats around the border of erstwhile Bihar and Bengal. Roma repeatedly tries to help Alope regain his memory, but fails. They end up falling in love and marrying, following which Alope meets with an accident. This accident brings back memories of life before Roma. Thus, he returns to his home in Calcutta and starts working in his family business. Roma reaches Calcutta in pursuit of Alope and finally secures a job of the governess to his niece. She tries to help Alope to regain his memory, who has transformed now to a haughty rich bhadralok., Ultimately she succeeds. Meanwhile, Alope is seen getting engaged with the upper-lipped, jealous Lata, who suspects Roma for trying to enchant Alope. However, following a misunderstanding with Alope's mother, Roma leaves her job and goes back to Palashpur. Finally, the couple reunites amidst the scenic location of Palashpur, as Alope, after gaining his memory back, goes in pursuit of Roma.

From the beginning of the film, the viewer identifies Uttam Kumar as someone from a rich family given his own ways and habits. It is difficult to relate him with a bhadralok before he comes to Palashpur. Once he starts regaining his sanity, markers of cultural capital seen clearly on him. Roma, the bhadramahila thus recovers the bhadralok in Alope. Probably one of the obvious indicators of this is his knowledge of playing the piano, an instrument which would be a prized possession of many bhadralok households then. his surname (Mukherjee – a brahmin) is also indicative of his upper caste origins. Later in the film this is further affirmed by his social and economic status by virtue of being the owner of a big private firm. However, many of his genteel characteristics vanish after he comes to Calcutta, where he becomes the business-minded,

haughty and rude owner of a private firm. Him being the owner of property also marks the shift from the bhadralok framework.

In the fashioning the division between the inner domain (ghar) and the outer domain (bahir) within the dynamics of this couple, it becomes easier for one to identify Alope and Roma as the bhadralok-bhadramahila duo. In Palashpur, this division persists very clearly as Alope is seen inhabiting and exploring the public domain much more than Roma, who spends most of her time caring and nurturing him inside the house. However, Alope's artistic pursuits decline after he comes to Calcutta, as he gets subsumed by work and familial duties. The art connoisseur romantic bhadralok in Alope is again reawakened by Roma, when she plays a particular tune of a song that she had sung on their wedding day. Following this, placing of the tube-roses (a recurring motif used to represent their life together in Palashpur) in Alope's room is an attempt at evoking Alope's memory. With gradual recouping of memory, Alope turns effeminate, more genteel, bhadralok from the rash workaholic businessman. His behaviour towards Roma changes and he becomes more understanding. In fact, the gesture of keeping a bunch of tube-roses in her bedroom portrays how he has started regaining his lost romantic bhadralok self. Alope's regaining of his memory shows the win of the romantic bhadralok over the workaholic businessman in him, and thus the film ends with them uniting in the scenic location of Roma's garden. Therefore, Alope can be read as the effeminate bhadralok, complimented by portrayal of the bhadramahila through Roma.

Roma does embody the ideal bhadramahila throughout the film. She wears the sari in a specific way, has a particular manner of speech and a specific kind of behaviour, similar to what is associated with the bhadramahila. Like that of other bhadramahila, her "bearing, dress, speech and access, were insistently interiorized" (Chattopadhyay, 2005, pg. 265). Apart from in the beginning, where she is shown practising as a doctor, she mostly inhabits the private domain. Calcutta, becomes the ultimate signifier of modernity in the film, as Roma ends up becoming the ultimate bhadramahila by confining herself entirely to the private realm of Alope's home after securing a job of governess to his niece.

Thus, it would not be wrong to claim the role that Uttam Kumar essays is that of a Bengali bhadralok. Alope's personality, especially before he loses his memory in Palashpur and after he regains it in Calcutta, point him being the cultured romantic bhadralok, as Uttam Kumar is still widely remembered as. This is affirmed by the presence of the bhadramahila as Roma, who plays a vital role in the recovery of the bhadralok in Alope.

Lal Pathar: A Case of Failed Genteel Aspirations

The next film, *Lal Pathar* (1964), which has been directed by Sushil Majumdar, is a perfect example of the genteel aspiration. This film belongs to the period when Uttam Kumar was consciously experimenting with his roles. He is paired in the film with another popular heroine of his time, Supriya Devi. Extremely successful on screen couple Uttam-Supriya, later married each other after Uttam Kumar divorced his first wife, which had generated great excitement in the Bengali film-goers. This opens up a space to discuss Uttam Kumar as a deviant¹ star, keeping his marital life being in focus. The character that Uttam Kumar essays in this film, Hemadakanta, is multifaceted; a psychologist, is the last heir of an aristocratic zamindar family who likes hunting and has a keen interest in literature and music. Apart from that he is whimsical, egoistic and masculine. It is while hunting that he saves Soudamini (Supriya Devi), from being attacked by a gang of dacoits. He brings her home and makes her his mistress, rechristening her as Madhuri. Eventually, Hemadakanta decides to marry and ends up marrying a young singer, Sumita. This incites jealousy in Madhuri, and sours their relationship. On suspecting an extra-marital affair, a jealous Hemadakanta ultimately ends up killing Sumita, and Ambarish. Hemadakanta narrates the story of the film in Fatehpur Sikri to a group of Bengali tourists thirty-five years later, with his bond with Madhuri still remaining intact. By the end of the film, Madhuri is shown taking care of an insane, frail Hemadakanta who roams the palaces of Fatehpur Sikri narrating these stories.

As a character, Hemadakanta is difficult to fit into the framework of the *bhadralok*. that he likes hunting, something which is considered to be an extremely manly sport, is a deviation from the framework of the effeminate, languorous and lazy *bhadralok*. Moreover, by virtue of hailing from a landed aristocratic family, Hemadakanta qualifies by the colonial standards of masculinity, owing to which it is furthermore difficult to refer to him as a *bhadralok*. Importantly, the *bhadralok* had links with petty zamindar, not with the kind of wealth that Hemadakanta possesses. However, particular aspects of his personality do raise questions about the ability or inability to identify him as a *bhadralok*. He displays a genteel-isque inclination towards becoming the *bhadralok*, because of the language he speaks and his taste for arts. His genteel aspirations are reflected in the gifts he gets for his mistress, Madhuri that changes her dressing style noticeably. Initially, when she visits the house, she is shown wearing a characteristic white than saree that Bengali widows wear, without a blouse. Thereafter, she is still seen wearing the white than saree, but with a sleeveless blouse this time.

In fact, the act of Hemadakanta rechristening Madhuri is indicative of his desire to give her the new identity of a *bhadramahila*. His desire is reflected in what he tells her when he bestows with this new identity, “from today, I shall call you Madhuri. I shall mentor you in my very own way. Bid adieu to Soudamini forever, Madhuri takes birth today.” Madhuri stops dressing like a

¹ The concept of the deviant star refers to the excesses that the star indulges in – in terms of consumption practices and sexuality, and transgresses (Hayward, 2006).

widow and chooses to dress in expensive jewellery and sarees, her transformation is done systematically through her introduction to things that would be emblematic of a bhadramahila, like education and music. Due to Madhuri's inability to fit into the ideal of bhadramahila, Hemadakanta gets frustrated. This frustration culminates in a middle-aged Hemadakanta's decision to marry a woman much younger, Sumita. Sumita displays every marker of the bhadramahila that Hemadakanta had tried to cultivate in Madhuri. Sumita is educated, speaks in typical chaste Bengali, and sings well. In fact, she unquestioningly admits to everything that Hemadakanta tells her, and thus illustrates how the bhadramahila is actually a "colonially re-worked version of the older Bengali sati (the chaste woman-wife)" (Bannerji, 1994, p.187). Moreover, for the larger part of the film, she is shown being confined to the private sphere.

Hemadakanta invites Sumita's former love interest and music teacher, Ambarish, to his house. Ambarish is identifiably a proper bhadralok in this film; he possesses knowledge in music and has a degree from England. Hemadakanta grows close to Ambarish and starts to admire him, displaying his affinity towards bhadralok culture. This is reflected in multiple encounters and conversations that they have. Ambarish starts visiting Hemadakanta regularly, and in the first instance, the two have a long conversation about literature, music and life. Ambarish even plays the piano and sings for Hemadakanta. Madhuri also desires to learn music from Ambarish, thus proving the attraction towards the ultimate bhadralok.

Hemadakanta's masculine ego, whims and his suspicion restricts viewers from identifying him as a bhadralok till the end of the film, when he ends up killing both Sumita and Ambarish, suspecting an extramarital affair between them. It should also be noted that the presence of the bhadramahila cannot necessarily affirm the status of Hemadakanta as a bhadralok, owing to his class position as well as his nature. The bhadralok was essentially a class that lacked the landed property of the rich landowners of Bengal. This basic contradiction makes it difficult to affirm Hemadkanta as a bhadralok. There are other deviations also from the bhadralok framework, starting with the practise of hunting to that of keeping a mistress. What can be understood from the character of Hemadakanta is how hegemonic the identity of the bhadralok is in the Bengali society. Even a tyrannical, whimsical landlord cannot avoid confirming to the ideal of the bhadralok. His very inability to conform to his own genteel aspirations is what haunts him his entire life and makes him anxious and lonely.

Nayak: A Complete Rejection of Genteel Values by a Star

The last, film *Nayak* (The Hero) (1966) is often considered to be one of the best films of Uttam Kumar. True to the name, Uttam Kumar is the hero of this film, which focuses explicitly on his stardom. The film revolves around the train journey he undertakes in order to go to New Delhi to collect a prize for one of his films. This journey formally runs parallel to the life journey of

Arindam Mukherjee, and through multiple flashbacks and dreams. The insecure, lonely life of a star is revealed. It is this film which raises multiple questions regarding Uttam Kumar's image as a bhadralok, owing to how he has been portrayed as the ultimate star. The question that the film poses is whether a star can be regarded a bhadralok. Arindam does display signs of being a bhadralok through his standardised Bengali accent, his clothing and his use of language, which is tinged with English. However, this notion has been problematized at the beginning of the film, where Arindam is seen reading the news about his brawl in a nightclub.

Thus, the film establishes him as a character that is masculine and does not conform to the ideals of the feminine, disciplined bhadralok. Interestingly, Arindam is travelling with the bhadralok, who appear to be quite divided over his status as an actor. A sharp difference is noticed between men and women with respect to their admiration for him. While most of the Bengali women seem to be his fans, men mostly appear indifferent to his star status. This difference is seen in the bhadralok-bhadramahila couple with whom he shares his coupe. The bhadralok, Mr. Bose openly displays his lack of admiration towards his films and cites American films as examples to look up to. The bhadramahila, however, turns out to be a huge fan. This therefore reflects the division. This attitude is in fact reflected among all the other bhadraloks that the film portrays – starting from the old political commentator Aghor Chatterjee, Arindam's mentor Shankarda and the advertising professional Prithvi Sarkar. A brief history of the film will ascertain that this was the reality to a certain extent. Ray's decision to make a film on the stardom of Uttam Kumar was questioned and criticised by the refined, elite bhadralok arthouse critics (Chowdhury, 2012). It is undoubted that he would have been able to win over their unquestioned admiration had they concurred in identifying him as a bhadralok in a manner that they do in 2018.

This particular lack of identification of the genteel class or the bhadralok with Uttam Kumar is reflected in the first conversation that he is seen having with Aditi Sengupta, a feminist journalist, who is travelling with him. This character was played by one of the famous actresses of Bengali and Hindi films of the time, Sharmila Tagore. Aditi, who runs a magazine of her own, avowedly avoids films, but decides to interview Arindam for her magazine. Her lack of identification with the quintessential fan of Arindam is clear in the way in which she clarifies that she wants an autograph for her cousin and not herself. In fact, she is the only Bengali woman in the film who is not a fan of the star. However, it is difficult to fit her in the framework of the bhadramahila. The primary reason being that the ghar-bahir distinction cannot be operationalized in her case. Aditi appears more of an independent woman, who is not chained by the shackles of the traditional bhadramahila framework. Therefore, Arindam refers to her as *adhunika* or Miss Modern. The two characters are radically different, Arindam the quintessential star and Aditi the sensitive, intellectual journalist. They strike a good friendship and thus in his conversations with her, the loneliness and the anxiety of the life of a star is revealed.

These questions are tackled in the film. Arindam's relationship with Shankar-da (da being the short form of dada, which means big brother in Bengali) is perhaps the most emblematic of the relationship between the bhadralok and the star. Shankar-da, a middle-aged theatre enthusiast, despises films and expresses his profound disappointment when he gets to know about the former's decision to act in films. His disappointment and anger is such that he dismisses a theatre rehearsal midway to speak to Arindam in private about the inherent problems of cinema as an art form. Shankar-da's sudden death removes all the obstacles from Arindam's path, and he finally signs the contract for his first film. Arindam's guilt for having never been able to live up to the expectations of his mentor is mirrored in a dream. In his dream Arindam finds himself in a land of money, with money raining on him. When the rain stops, and he hears multiple telephones ringing, with the receiver resting on the hand of a skeleton. There is quick flash of "Horibol" (translates as chant the name of Hari), a common Hindu practice of chanting while taking a dead body for cremation. With the chant in the background he is seen getting absorbed in a hole which gradually traps him and pulling him down. As he sinks, he sees Shankar-da sitting nearby, clad in a magnificent costume of a nawab, wearing gruesome make-up. A drowning Arindam pleads Shankar-da to save him, who does reach out to him but withdraws at the last moment. From a close-up shot of the two hands, the camera cuts to a drowning Arindam, to Arindam's hand banging against the train window in his sleep.

Shankarda is the true bhadralok in this case. Depiction of money signifies the endless cycle of popularity, greed and growth that a star aspires for. In fact, the money mirrors Arindam's aspirations that have been portrayed earlier in the film as well, especially his desire to "reach to the top, the top, the top" as had been asserted by him to his friend and manager Jyoti at the beginning of his career. As has been established, the star is a deviation from the bhadralok framework and this sequence highlights that depicting perfectly, Arindam losing out on the bhadralok values and gradually getting submerged into the vices and problems of the life of a star. This highlights the essential clash between the values of the bhadralok and the star. The relation between Arindam and Shankarda thus represents the friction and tension between the values of the critical, cultured bhadralok and the star. This dream is symbolic of Arindam's genteel aspirations as a star. He drowns in the quicksand of desire and greed, deserted by his genteel values. This again points at how hegemonic the category of bhadralok is, such that even a megastar suffers from anxiety and insomnia for not being able to conform and live up to the ideals of a bhadralok. It is difficult to argue that the identity of the star can go hand-in-hand with that of the bhadralok. The star is economically better placed than the bhadralok and unlike the latter does not hold a job and may or may not have a leaning towards capitalistic enterprise. These factors add up to the difficulty of confirming whether the bhadralok can be thought of as a star or not.

Conclusion

Three films portray three different characters essayed by Uttam Kumar and this comparative study has tried to discuss about the negotiations between them and the normative bhadralok values. The first film portrays Uttam Kumar unquestionably as the ultimate bhadralok. The second film essays a negotiation between feudal and bhadralok values, and thus portrays Hemadakanta as a feudal landlord but with genteel aspirations. In fact, one might debate that it is this clash of values that has been highlighted in the film. Thus, on one hand, he appears to be the tyrannical, whimsical, self-obsessed aristocrat while on the other hand he tries to become the understanding, appreciative, rational art enthusiast bhadralok. The last film serves as perfect exposition of how hegemonic the bhadralok identity can be by illustrating how a film megastar like Arindam Mukherjee still has to conform to the established framework of this identity. It is evident from these films that the absolute rejection of the dominant hegemonic values of the society, values of bhadralok is indeed quite tough. This departure, is not only from the values of a certain social class, but also from that of the values of rationalism and self-awareness established by Bengal Renaissance. Bereft of these values, Hemadakanta kills two people and ultimately ends up in the ruins of Fatehpur Sikri as an old madman, narrating his own story to the tourists who visit the historical site. A narcissistic, lonely and depressed Arindam, on the other hand, has nobody close to share his problems with, and thus takes resort to sleeping pills and alcohol.

Thus, the biggest takeaway from the exploration of these films is the study of the hegemonising power of the bhadralok in Bengali society. Thus, in spite of several experiments with a variety of roles, Uttam Kumar remained confined to the identity of the Bengali bhadralok. The case of his stardom is such that there is no sign of it diminishing even almost four decades after his death. It is beyond the scope of this paper to comment whether this can be read as a sign of increasing dominance of the bhadralok in Bengal. It is interesting to note that Uttam Kumar unlike Arindam Mukherjee, was able to balance between the identity of a superstar and the bhadralok, especially after his death. Uttam Kumar is a unique case study of stardom arising out of a hegemonic society.

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