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AJANTRIK

(The Mechanical Man)



Bimal's taxi splashes on a wayside madman.

1958 B&W/102 mins/Bengali

Direction/Screenplay

Ritwik Ghatak

Camera

Dinen Gupta

Music

Ustad Ali Akbar Khan

Players

Kali Bannerji (Bimal),

Gyanesh Mukherjee

(the mechanic),

Deepak (the boy),

Gangapada Basu

(the boy's uncle),

Kajal Gupta (young woman),

Anil Chatterjee (her lover),

Keshto Mukherji

(the mad man).

Enquiries

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Bimal is a taxi driver in a small provincial town. He works a circuit that includes some mining and industrial areas in Eastern India with concentrated pockets of tribal inhabitants. The landscape reveals dry rocks, bad roads, desolate fields and occasionally, great, ancient trees. Bimal lives alone. The taxi, Jagatdal, is his only companion. It's a battered old Ford limping on decrepit limbs, uncertain brakes, erratic ignition, forgetful headlights, but to Bimal the apple of his eye, almost the purpose of his life. Full of a precarious pride, he sits in the car at the local railroad station, waiting for a fare. Ranged alongside Jagatdal is an array of contemporary Chevrolet and Pontiac models, all in the prime of youth.

His days and nights stretch out on the road delivering passengers from one point to another. His life, a kaleidoscope of episodes brought about by brief encounters with men and women riding behind him. Once, it's a man and girl, obviously enroute to an assignation. Bimal deposits them at a motel and forgets all about them. A few days later the girl becomes his lone passenger, subdued, brooding, her worries obviously out of control. Bimal figures out the scene. The man has disappeared. The cabby brings her to the railroad station, buys her a ticket and puts her on the train. The train pulls out of view, revealing a forlorn

Bimal mourning, momentarily, the departure of a stranger. Another time, it's an elderly man in a desperate hurry to catch a train to be in time to see a dear one near death. Bimal makes it just in time. The passenger expresses his gratitude.

Once, it's a group of tribals off the train, wanting to go to their secluded village. Bimal decides to get lost in this idyllic surrounding.

Bimal knows that his car is dying. He spends hours tinkering with the old workhorse. By turns, it is his slave and his son, a son he nurtures like a heart. He orders costly spares hoping to rebuild the car's disintegrating faculties and put it back on the road. He talks to the car. Comforts it. Promises it a resurrected life. All he hears, however, is the death rattle. Finally, the silence of death. Jagatdal is very dead.

A merchant arrives to claim the corpse he will sell as junk and enables Bimal to pay back the loan he has incurred in ordering the futile spares.

The din rises in Bimal's house. Jagatdal is being dismembered. The mortal remains of Jagatdal are taken away on a bullock cart, a coffin to Bimal.

Nirmal Goswami

Filmography

1952

NAGARIK (The Citizen)

B&W/120 mins/Bengali

*Lead players: Satendra Bhattacharya, Sova Sen
Kali Bannerjee, Ketaki Devi.*



Ramu unemployed, lives with his parents, sister Gita and kid brother, Pintu. The sister's marriage and the brother's schooling are major problems. Ramu determinedly tries for a job. He falls in love with Uma, which gives his life a purpose. Sagar comes to live with the family as a paying guest and becomes a rival. Ramu and Uma drift apart. Ramu's father dies. Uma's sister becomes a prostitute. The family decide to move to a working class neighbourhood. Strains of the 'Communist Internationale' fill the sound track.

1959

BARI THEKE PALIYE (The Runaway)

B&W/123 mins/Bengali

*Lead players: Pram Bhattarak Lahiri, Padma Devi,
Sailen Ghosh.*

Kanchan, a little village boy enjoys escapades away from home in a big city and finds many an accidental benefactor. . . Haridas, a teacher turned street peddler, an aging maid-servant, a gangster masquerading as a magician, a cart pusher, and Mini, a small girl with wealthy parents. Kanchan is restored to his parents in the village. He tells his father that the city is an aberration; there's nothing like home.



1960

MEGHE DHIKA TARA (The Hidden Star)

B&W/120 mins/Bengali

Lead players: Supriya Chowdhury, Anil Chatterjee, Gita Ghatak.

Nita, the protagonist, dies a slow death, orchestrated by a remorseless chain of misfortunes. In a family driven by abject poverty, Nita is the only earning member. Because of it she sacrifices the one man in her life to her younger sister, Gita. An unemployed brother, devoted to music, becomes a famous singer. Another brother finds a job. Just when fortune smiles, Nita is struck by tuberculosis and removed to a sanatorium in the mountains. The brother sings about the joys of life to a sister in the throes of death.

KOMAL GANDIHAR (E Flat)

B&W/110 mins/Bengali

Lead players: Supriya Chowdhury, Avinash Bannerjee, Anil Chatterjee, Bijon Bhattacharya.

Bhrigu's mission in life is to reach the people through theatre. Amusua, a girl interested in his work, tries to help him. A particular play is affected because of Shanta, a member of the group, who has differing ideas about their cause. She finally defects. Bhrigu is ridiculed for the failure of the play. Amusua stands by him. They face the future with courage and hope.

1962

SUBARNAREKHA

B&W/132 mins/Bengali

Lead players: Madhabi Mukherjee, Satindra Bhattacharya, Abhi Bhattacharya, Jahar Roy

Ishwar works in a foundry on the bank of the river Subarnarekha in Eastern India. He lives with his sister Sita and with Abhiram, an orphan, who grow up and fall in love with each other. They run away to Calcutta and live in dire poverty made worse by the birth of a son, Binu. One day Abhiram is lynched to death and Sita is forced into prostitution. Ishwar, a lonely and weary man, is in town

*Still from
Titash Ekti
Nadir Naam
(A River Named Titash).*



seeking pleasure. The brother meets his sister as a customer. The humiliation drives Sita to suicide. Ishwar returns to the river bank with his little nephew Binu.

1973

TITASH EKI NADIR NAAM (A River Named Titash)
(Made in Bangladesh) Approximately 140 mins.

Lead players: Rosy, Sufia, Kabari Chowdhury, Ravi Sarkar

Titash, a river in Bangladesh, is drying up. Its fishing community is disintegrating. The river is threatened by encroaching sands. The fisherfolk seek work elsewhere. People from the city come to claim the land to turn it into a paddy field. Basanti, a lonely woman, is the last remaining member of the fishing community still clutching at a way of life which is doomed.

1974

JUKTI, TAKKO AAR GAPPO
(Reason, Debate and a Tale)

B&W/120 mins/Bengali

Lead players: Ritwik Ghatak, Tripti Mitra, Saonli Mitra, Bijon Bhattacharya

Episodes in the life of Neelkantha, the protagonist, reveal the moral alienation of Bengali intellectuals of the early seventies, the social impact of the war of liberation in Bangladesh and the agrarian tensions created by the Naxalite movement—a militant communist group—in Eastern India. Neelkantha, about to be reunited with an estranged wife, is accidentally shot by a police bullet. There are other deaths among men and women who are in love.

SOME IMPORTANT DOCUMENTARIES

1955 **Oroan** (a tribal group)

1963 **Ustad Allauddin Khan** (a noted musician)

1964-65 **Fear** (short film)

1967 **Scientists of Tomorrow**

1970 **Chhao Dance of Purulia**

1970 **Amaar Lenin** (A short film which has been publicly screened in the USSR but not in India)

1970 **Yeh Kyon** (short film) Hindi

1971 **Where the Padma Flows** (partly in colour)

1975 **Ram Kinkar** (Ghatak died before completing the film)

SCREENPLAYS

1955 **Musafir** (The Traveller) Hindi

1955 **Madhumati** Hindi

1960 **Swarlipi** (Musical Notation)

1962 **Kunwari Mon**

1963 **Dwiper Naam Tiyaarang** (An Island Named Tiyaarang)

1965 **Rajkanya** (The Princess)