Introduction

Imperialism in its most subtle form attempts to eliminate the culture of the subjugated nation. It does this among other things, through the policy of cultural assimilation which gradually marginalises, and eventually reconstitutes the subject nation’s cultural paradigms in its own mould. It also begins to reconstruct a past for that nation, a history that will subtly provide the justifications for the colonial takeover. Though such hegemonic patterns continue to operate, sooner or later the subject people strongly feel the need to reclaim and assert their identity which is usually posited as different from that of the colonizers. The consequent cultural/political resurgence manifests itself broadly at two levels, political and psychic. At the first level, top priority is accorded to the political emancipation of the country both through cultural propaganda mode and direct political action. At the second level, the struggle takes place against the colonized psyche; in this, a separate national identity is postulated as an assertion of the self. This ‘national identity’ is seldom monolithic or homogeneous, rooted as it is within the cultural complex of several national/regional identities within a country. Still it is offered and perceived as a single identity primarily for the national assertion of the subjugated nation. Ironically, when the nation attains its independence these various national/regional identities are conveniently subsumed by it.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century India witnessed the emergence of a national identity. Literature which began appearing in different languages from mid-nineteenth century onwards was a significant factor in that emergence.

The All India Progressive Writers’ Association (AIPWA: 1936)
and the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association (IPTA: 1943) were perhaps the most crucial manifestations of the response of Indian writers, artists and intellectuals to the intense, nationwide people's struggle against the colonial regime. Of course, external factors also paved the way for the artists and the writers to unite and stand together for the defence of culture against fascism, imperialism and war. These factors included the social matrix the world over in general, and the fascist uprising in Europe, the inspiring presence of U.S.S.R. as a future possibility for the entire humankind, the Japanese invasion of China, the ongoing war to save the Republican Spain and the sacrifice of a writer like Garcia Lorca in the civil war, all these events brought about a certain unification in the writers and artists the world over. The artists spoke in forms that were either radical and avant-garde or utilised popular, folk expression. Thus underlying the formation of AIPWA and IPTA was a common belief shared by Indian writers, artists and intellectuals that the time had come to build a new social order based on equality, freedom and peace.

A few months before the formation of AIPWA, an International Congress of Writers was organized in Paris in 1935. Writers like Roman Rolland, Andre Gide, E. M. Foster, Thomas Mann and Maxim Gorky were among those present. The writers gave a call to stand by life against death. Sajjad Zaheer, a young Urdu writer, who was then studying in London, was also present there. He along with Mulk Raj Anand and some others had already conceived the idea of an Indian Progressive Writers' Association. The idea was strengthened in the Writers' Meet at Paris. At the home front the progressive and Socialist writers were already realizing the need to bring the artists and intellectuals together in an organized way to fight imperialism.
1932 saw the publication of a radical literary work, *Angare*. It included short stories by four Urdu writers. The attacks it received also inspired the artists to open a cultural and literary front to counter reactionary forces in the country. All this finally led to the formation of AIPWA which had its first meeting at Lucknow in April, 1936.

The new writings added a new, political dimension to Indian literature. They signified the coming together of progressive forces in both formal and ideological terrains. The 'Kallol Group' of writers was formed in Bengal primarily to fight sentimentalism in art. The Oriya progressive writers formed the 'Nabayuga Sahity Parishad.' Similarly, the 'Jival Sahity Samiti' was formed by Malayali writers. Literature was expected to became a torch-bearer to all the progressive movements in society. A literary person was required to participate actively in social struggles. Art was to be valued only if it led to action. In his presidential address delivered to the first All India Progressive Writers Association on April 10, 1936, Munshi Premchand fervently hoped that the "new art will be inspired and moved by a mass-consciousness, sustained and motivated by a mass content." As ideology assumed utmost primacy, the issue of language in art receded. The writers were convinced that if ideology was correct, language would definitely become simpler and better and the content would determine its own form. They strongly believed that the literature of the 'masses' had to speak their own language. In the manifesto it adopted, the Association issued a call to introduce scientific rationalism in literature and to combat literary trends reflecting communalism, exploitation, racial antagonism and sexual libertinism.

The issue of realism was brought to the fore. It was felt
necessary to adopt the realist mode in literature; to bring art into the closest contact with people, and to transform art into a vital organ which would register the actualities of life. The manifesto read:

We believe that the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today - the problem of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjection. All that drags us down to passivity, inaction and unreason we reject as reactionary. All that arouses in us the critical spirit, which examines institutions and customs in the light of reason, which helps us to act, to organize ourselves, to transform, we accept as progressive.

Thus art became a part of the political struggle; any art that was apolitical and neutral was declared unacceptable. Within a few years of its formation, Marxist thought became so dominant in the Association that very soon the latter began to be looked upon as the literary front of the Communist Party of India.

AIPWA led to the formation of IPTA. The early 1940s in India witnessed one of the most repressive phases of Imperialism. In the artificial Bengal famine in 1943 thousands died because rice was stored for war supply. The famine led to wide-spread corruption and black marketing. Epidemics followed hunger and starvation, and took thousands of lives. It was during this period that IPTA was formed. The period also witnessed the chaos caused by the Mountbatten Accord and subsequent communal violence. The artists took a pledge to defend India, to fight against the engineered famine and for a national government, against communalism and for the release of thousands in jail. They pledged their art to the cause of mobilizing and unifying the people. It was to be a means of portraying life and reality of the people, of reviving their faith in themselves and their past, and of straightening their will to life and freedom.

Based on the same percepts as AIPWA, IPTA concentrated on
theatre. Central to it was the belief that the people's theatre must evolve from the organized mass movement of workers, peasants, students, youth and the middle class. The people's theatre movement was expected to spread across the nation through different mass organizations. The theatre thus would directly connect with the ongoing political movements.

Apart from being an instrument of propaganda, art, at a deeper level, was also viewed as a potent weapon in the fight against the deep-seated colonized psyche, especially if it utilized the folk forms. Art was thus to help in reclaiming the 'national identity.' But this national identity as asserted by the then dominant Marxist thought was by no means a unified identity. One of the IPTA Bulletins explicitly demands that:

... all the various nationalities of India be given every facility to develop their own language and culture, their own stage, folk art and literature... We believe that the best vehicles of expression for each nationality are its own national forms in its own language. We shall fight all attempts at national exclusiveness and National superiority and the imposing on any people of a language other than its mother language.4

The idea was to fight against the tyranny of monolingualism and acculturation in the name of cultural assimilation. Individual national identities were to be retained and strengthened. They were to come together on a national front but without subscribing to any homogenized, unified national identity. On this issue there was a major difference between the Communist Party of India and the Indian National Congress. Indian Marxists while stressing the need for combating imperialism insisted on people retaining their separate as well as class-identities. It was the denial of the freedom from class oppression on the one hand and on the other the attempt to subjugate and assimilate their separate identities that led to the people's strong sense of betrayal by India's Independence. Independence came to be
regarded as a sham by the AIPWA and IPTA artists.

IPTA also theorized on the form of the new theatre. One of its principal precepts related to the retrieval of the rich cultural heritage was through interpreting, adapting it so as to integrate it with people’s lives and aspirations. It sought to fuse the past traditional forms, chiefly folk but also classical, with contemporary themes. The new theatre was to emerge from a synthesis of the folk and the classical with modern stage technique and lighting. Hence in order to connect with people it was necessary to ground the work in reality, past and tradition. IPTA believed that the artists must identify and learn from people and also study the forms in which their traditional culture has been embodied. They must, at the same time, develop these forms within the distinctive national characteristics of each particular area.

The premium placed on people’s culture led to the debate and question of how to encompass holy texts like the *Puranas*, the *Upanishads*, and the ancient philosophy. It was felt that such texts dealt not so much with any particular religion as with the religion of ‘man’. Drawing a distinction between religion and the mythic consciousness, IPTA maintained that the latter forms part of the people’s psychic contours. A work devoid of this consciousness, they believed, would be superfluous and without any lasting influence. In one of these debates, one IPTA activist, Sachin Sengupta, asserted: "If the gana want our ancient legendary plays, which I know they do, there is no reason to consider the work of meeting that demand a sign of backwardness." For their inspiration, many IPTA artists turned both to the epics and plays of the past, and to Bharat’s *Natyashastra*, and Bhasa, Kalidas, etc. Similarly, folk forms’
like the *Panchali* were revived for accommodating contemporary problems. Mukunda Das, a folk artist, revived the *Jatra* and blended it with political issues. Again, *Harikatha*, with its traditional method of relating tales from the epics and *puranas*, was used to narrate stories of heroism in the present context. Old folk forms in songs and dances, like the songs of mendicants, were adopted, but their content was changed: instead of diagnosing bodily diseases, social diseases were diagnosed and appropriate action prescribed.

The fortune-teller would tell the fortune of the nation, the *Fakir* would preach social morality. *Tamasha*, an improvised form, was used a great deal and stories from well known mythologies were juxtaposed with happenings in the localities. Old folk forms, thus developed in the popular way, while also retaining their strength and vigour. The stage-craft was improvised keeping in mind that used in the folk arts. Many a time the folk artists themselves were encouraged to perform and to incorporate the contemporary within their mode.

Social consciousness acquired utmost importance in art. It was believed that the art born out of the deep identity of the consciousness of the artist with reality, out of a great vision of an artist, carries with it its own distinctive form.

Though willing to absorb the experience of progressive theatre movements abroad, the IPTA activists sought to stay within the national tradition and to develop the specific cultures of various nationalities. They opposed vehemently all those cosmopolitan tendencies that had no relevance to the people's living conditions and social struggle. IPTA determined to get close to the 'masses,' to learn from them and at the same time to mould them. To carry out this two fold task IPTA
employed several strategies and devices:

As the content of the plays touched the fundamental problems of the people's lives, the spectators felt involved and many a time they would join in the performance. Besides they would participate in the discussions that followed. It was through the perspective of this feedback that the next production was formed.

At times the people were asked to write and produce plays. In this collective activity, a group of people would sit together and evolve a plot, define the characters and situations. The framework would then be handed over to one person who would write the dialogues. The group would then discuss the complete play; if necessary, further alterations would be made even after the performance.

Thus, IPTA deliberated a good deal on theoretic issues such as the modes of expression, stylistics, folk traditions and foreign influence. Stanislavsky was invited to present his theories of Realism and Naturalism. In two significant conferences, there was detailed discussion on folk tradition and how to interpret and incorporate it in plays centrally devoted to contemporary issues, on stagecraft, especially in tradition, the issue of fusing politics in theatre, the format likely to appeal both to the city and the village audience, and on the hero and the villain in an IPTA play. The conferences also addressed themselves to the question of developing stage craft and technique, especially lighting, as a significant component of theatre. The need of developing the existing village stage through decor, lights, and costumes was also discussed. It was within this problematics that IPTA's performances were constantly examined and scrutinized by the IPTA artists themselves.
In the process of evolving a theoretical basis for theatre several experiments were conducted. At times the text was not strictly followed but the actors were asked to extemporize according to the tempo on stage, keeping the theme in mind. The notion of the Natya Mandal, Gana Natya became popular, where the themes of the play revolve around the lives of several people. Indepth research on past traditions and local distinctive characteristics was undertaken as a part of developing the people's theatre.

Adhering to its strong ideology IPTA made a significant intervention in the nation’s thought and politics. Its presentations, on the one hand, were genuine contributions to the Indian Marxist ideology and, on the other, reflected this ideology. Most of them revolved around significant socio-political themes such as the Bengal famine, imperialism and its far reaching implications, the devastation caused by the world wars, the partition of India, the subsequent communal violence and its culmination in the formation of the refugee. Though imperialism was one of IPTA’s main concerns yet nowhere do IPTA’s presentations celebrate India’s independence. They rather problematise the notion of Independence within the Marxist framework where freedom is related to class rather than nationality. The performances interrogated the formation of the Indian Nation-state, which was primarily based on the principle of exclusion, exile and division.

Some of the plays to problematise contemporary socio-political themes were Yeh Azadi Kya Jis Me Mazdoor Ka Hak Na He, Sune Hind ke Rehne Wale, Ritwik Ghatak’s Dolil, K. A. Abbas’s Janmabhumi, Sheila Bholia’s Call of the Valley and the ballet Spirit of India. These plays focused on the issue of
imperialism, its consequences and the need to retrieve the occupied territory along with one's roots. *Spirit of India*, the ballet in folk form, traced the history of India from the advent of the British to the present, covering the phases of hoarders and black marketeers, famine and epidemic. It ended on a note of hope: by uniting, the people could overthrow the bureaucrats, hoarders and black marketeers and could help secure the release of National leaders from prison. By revealing the nexus between hoarding and blackmarketeering and the imperialist ideology, the ballet clarified that any genuine liberation of India required the eradication of class disparities. Ghatak's *Dolil* also examines the notion of Independence. An East Bengal family, uprooted during partition, exists in utter misery on the crowded platforms of Sealdah Station in Calcutta. When the Prime Minister, Nehru, arrives on a visit, it bands together with other refugees in demanding relief. However, they, are all greeted with tear gas and bullets by the police.6 *Dolil*, besides analyzing the state of homelessness, indirectly focuses on post-independence India questioning the meaning of Independence. For there has not been any break with the colonizer's paradigm of discrimination in post-1947 India. Independence has only resulted in the uncalled for partition and the formation of the refugee. In a similar vein, several films, especially most of Ghatak's films, Bimal Rai's *Do Biga Zamine* and Nemai Ghosh's *Chinnamul* reflect the complexity surrounding the issue of National liberation.

In terms of its effects on people, the Bengal famine strongly reflected the devastating consequences of imperialism. Several of its dimensions were taken up by the IPTA activists in presentations such as *Bhooka hai Bengal, Hunger and Epidemic Dance* by Usha Dutta and Panu Pal, Bijon Bhattacharya's *Jabanbandi*
and *Nabanno*, Jyotindra Moitra's *Navajibaner Gan*, a song dance opera about the rehabilitation of the Bengal peasantry and their new life after the famine and pestilence. *Chenna-Jaan*, a drama in the form of a *Harikatha*, is a story of a Muslim peasant before, during and after the great Bengal famine. Similarly *Shapath*, a ballet too dealt with the theme of the famine. But it was Bijon Bhattacharya’s *Nabanno* (New Harvest) that brought about a certain transformation in terms of developing a different perspective in thought, action and theatrical form. Written around the same time as Jyotindra Moitra’s *Navajibanar Gan*, the play was directed jointly by Bijon Bhattacharya and Shambu Mitra. A full length play in four Acts, it describes the life of the Bengal peasantry during the Bengal famine. It also depicts the peasants’ return to their homes and the new harvest which resuscitates their faith in the future. The play had forty performances in Calcutta alone. Invitations came from all over and some 40,000 people watched the play. *Nabanno* set a landmark both in artistic treatment, especially dramatic performance, and in subject-matter. It presented the peasants with the August Movement, flood, famine and epidemic in the background. Apart from raising people’s social awareness through the famine plays, the activists also contributed part of the earning from the performances to the People’s Relief Committee. Rs.10,000/- went to it from a box office collection of *Nabanno* alone. In 1943, the Delhi branch of IPTA gave a call to save Bengal.

War and its effects constituted another significant theme in IPTA plays. Those to depict the effects of war on India included *Janak*, *Atom and Man*, and *Chaar Adhyaya*. Other significant IPTA presentations were poems by Jyotindra Moitra *Madhubanishir Goli*, Uday Shankar’s presentation of *Ramayana* through dance projected as a shadow play, Chetan Anand’s *Gaon*, Julius Fuchik’s *Notes from*
the Gallows, Monoranjan Bhattacharya's Homeopathy, K. A. Abbas's Zubeida, and Gorky's Lower Depths. Besides Nabanno, there were two other landmark plays: Dinabandhu Mitra's Nirdarpan, a play on the Indigo riots in Bengal, and Bhaskara Pillai's You Made Me a Communist. The plays questioned the British Imperialist policies. Bhaskara Pillai's four-hour epic drama was staged 85 times within a time span of 97 days. Some other IPTA presentations were remarkable for their examination of moments that created history. The artists intervened to bring about unity through their references to the past history and tradition and its connection with the present. Moreover, they actively intervened to get the leaders released in jail.

In most of these presentations the themes were contemporary but were coded in the folk medium and had, therefore, great appeal for the spectators. Stage, form, stylistics were vastly problematized, and lighting techniques were experimented with. Though the basic aim was to present reality, yet unlike AIPWA which employed the realist mode, the IPTA artists preferred the folk and the epic. In this mode, the illusion of reality is dispensed with, and, through obvious improvisation, theatre is presented as theatre, an area of inquiry and analysis.

IPTA and AIPWA, following Josh Mahinabadi's call for the regimentation of writers, felt that the people's theatre movement must emerge principally from different mass movements. Accordingly, IPTA activists performed in support of protest groups, besides siding with the teachers strike, the tram fare movement, and the movement against a blockade of Pakistan. They helped many protest groups by staging plays reflecting their basic demands, and also protested with them.

The birth of IPTA thus coincided both with various dynamic
socio-political processes and mass movements. Within the framework of a people’s war, the Communists led the Tebhaga movement (Sharecroppers’ struggle) in Bengal, Telengana struggle in Andhra, Punnapra Vayalar in Kerala, Worli’s struggle in Maharashtra and the Peasants’ struggle in Tanjore. They also sided with R.I.N. Mutiny. Some of these struggles were reflected in IPTA’s presentations.

IPTA thus initially was formed to assert the struggle for a national identity in response to the imperialist and the fascist forces. But even at that time it primarily believed that the struggle against the imperialist was fundamentally a class struggle and only overtly a national struggle. Eventually over the years especially after the independence of India it directly stated its class perspective and both reflected as well as participated in the emerging class struggles of the people.

II

Unlike the theatre the Indian Film Industry had no anti-imperialist history. One of its initial productions was the filming of the coronation of King George and Queen Mary in 1911. From 1912 to 1930 America overwhelmed the Indian market, exporting not only finished pictures but also the raw material and necessary equipment. Though after 1931 it lost part of the Indian audience, the loss was more than made up through the export of raw films, Camera equipment, projectors, sound apparatus, etc. In 1927 India imported raw film worth rupees six lakhs. This figure had climbed up to rupees one crore and twenty-five lakhs by 1950-51. Projection equipment of rupees ten lakhs was also imported from the U.S. With this control over equipment and raw material, the U.S tried to kill the Indian
Industry after the Second World War.

On the other side the British government also brought raw film under control with the result the average yearly production of films came down from 154 in 1940 to 99 in 1945, along with the control on the supply of the matrix for printing the gramophone records and of radio equipment. Further between 1943 and 1945 India produced only 372 pictures in all, while 721 foreign pictures received censor certificates in Bombay alone. Of these pictures ninety percent were American. Six hundred and seventy American films were shown in India in 1949. The best film houses were in Anglo-American hands. These figures clearly reveal the many-sided domination of foreign capital over the Indian cinema. Moreover, most of the Indian films were only Indian in label; they followed the Hollywood in plot and technique. The Bombay studios were swamping the less resourceful sections of the industry in the name of free enterprise. Also, the Indian films were mostly produced with foreign capital.

It was this Anglo-American stronghold that led the IPTA activists to intervene strongly in Indian cinema. There was urgent need to counter American images which were invading the Indian psyche with authentic Indian images. The popularity of plays like Nabanno made the activists confident that cinema could further enthral the masses as it could also simultaneously reach out to a vast section of people. Hence, IPTA decided to actively intervene in cinema both at the level of concept and production. It decided to produce its own films. In order to develop a thoughtful cinema it also undertook the task of screening significant films especially from the Soviet Union and China. Several discussions and conferences were held on Cinema. This period also witnessed the launching of the Nizam Weekly, a
Besides, there had been repeated attacks by the Indian government on anti-imperialist films, and this awakened the artists and technicians to the unholy alliance between the government and the British (Anglo-American) imperialists. They demanded freedom for Indian film industry, a fixed quota of foreign films, and the liberal sanction of licences for touring cinemas. They were convinced that these moves would ensure economic progress and mark a significant step in the struggle for national liberation and self-determination, besides ensuring the cultural progress of different linguistic areas. However, the government refused to concede the demands, thus aggravating the struggle.

In June 1951, a resolution was framed demanding, on the one hand, exhibitions of the world's best films, plays and paintings in India and, on the other, exhibitions of India's best productions abroad. The resolution also emphasized the importance of documentary films. Attempts were made to improve the technique and content of commercial cinema, especially the narrative element. In the conferences on cinema, debates revolved around the need to take the help of big businessmen to create progressive cinema. The creation of realistic films; the connection between natural acting and the common people; the experiments related to sound, technique and lighting; and finally the question related to creating films for the common people were also among the significant points which emerged in the debates. With the co-operation of a number of film artists IPTA helped in the production of three films for the cause of peace; the films were IPTA's answer to the war propaganda of Hollywood films. The activists appealed to the government and the Board of Censors to
ban films glorifying violence and war, and decided to mobilize public opinion through correct criticism and to counter the Hollywood influence. Several committees were appointed to supervise, control and arrange the production of films. Most of the IPTA people who came to cinema continued to work in theatre as well.

In 1953 the Film Commission of IPTA made several recommendations. The chief amongst these was the need for cinema to help the common people. They felt that the film industry had come to an impasse and the film-makers were in a dilemma. They did not quite know how to select realistic themes, and lacked the courage to experiment with new ideas. The commission felt that the time was ripe for the era of realism in Indian cinema, that it should get aligned with the progressive realist cinema of the world. The progressive, pro-people workers of the film industry should form an organization wherein they could exchange ideas and help each other. It was suggested that a guild of writers on an all India basis would be of great help to the cine-artists in tackling their creative problems. The Commission suggested that the film makers stage the film-script before filming it, to determine public reaction to it. In this way, the stage could be a resource for cinema. The basic assumption was films must help the common people in their day to day struggle, help them attain freedom from social and economic enslavement.

Following the strict percepts laid by IPTA, the first film to be produced under the IPTA banner was Dharti ke Lal. It depicted in a realistic manner the life of Indian peasants in general and the famine-affected Bengal peasantry in particular. K. A. Abbas was asked to prepare a composite story by drawing on the People's theater's Nabanno and Jabanbandi and
Krishan Chander’s novelette Ann Datta. The cast was selected from different sections of the People’s Theatre. K. A. Abbas was appointed as the Producer-Director, with Balraj Sahni, Shambu Mitra and P. K. Gupta as Associate Producers. Dharti Ke Lal thus signified a great deal of collaboration. Co-operation came not only from all IPTA branches and activists but also from several studios, technicians and professional film stars. Moreover, the film was absolutely realistic, its subject being the ongoing struggle of real people, whom it successfully involved. For instance, for a scene of hunger march, the crowd consisted of the members of the Kisan Sabha of Maharashtra.

The other films produced under the IPTA banner were Uday Shankar’s Kalpana, and Chetan Anand’s Nicha Nagar. The former was rooted in the Indian tradition of dance and took a critical look at the institution of cinema. Chetan Anand’s Nicha Nagar was based on Gorky’s The Lower Depths and depicted the lives of people struggling to make both ends meet.

Though only a handful of films were produced directly under the IPTA banner, many films foregrounded the IPTA ideology in their form, content and structure. These were directed by the IPTA activists themselves, and got the cast and technicians from IPTA itself. These included Nemai Ghosh’s Chinnamul, Bimal Rai’s Do Biga Zamine, and Udayer Pathey, and Ritwik Ghatak’s Nagarik and Komal Gandhar. These films met the political scenario head-on. Dharti ke Lal focussed itself around the Bengal famine, and Do Biga Zamine and Nicha Nagar set an inquiry into the state of ordinary people in post-Independence India. They questioned the notion of Independence and the prospects of the citizens in ‘free India’. Chinnamul, Nagarik, and Komal Gandhar besides critiquing ‘Independence’, analyzed the partition of the country, especially
the way it turned the citizen into an exile. Almost all these films offer strong images of communal violence, deprivation, and unemployment. They further reflect the state of homelessness which is transformed into a metaphor of an exodus that is perpetually on the move.

Ritwik Ghatak's Komal Gandhar emerges as a significant historical document of IPTA. It not only documents the activities of IPTA but focuses its structure on the division of IPTA and the crisis that the group underwent. The crisis within the group is further used as a metaphor for the partition and the consequent displacement of millions. The film strongly links itself with the IPTA artists many of whom participated in its production. It directly refers to Mukunda Das, Sukunto Bhattacharya, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Bijon Bhattacharya, Jyotindra Moitra, Bishnu Dev, and many other IPTA activists. Further, the film embodies the IPTA ideology in its form, structure and content. Rooted in the lives of the people, the film in its form connects itself with the Shakuntalam legend and the folklore surrounding the myth of Ram and Sita. It places the contemporary crisis within the legendary and the mythic matrix of separation, division and displacement. Thus situating itself in the mythic configurations belonging to the epic psyche of the people, the film develops itself within the epic form. It explicitly presents the problems that the IPTA artists faced and illustrates their concerns with sound, light and technique. The film today survives as one of the rare documents of IPTA's musical compositions and lyrics. Further, the film presents the construction of plays in the context of IPTA, documenting the mode of the IPTA presentations along with the response and the participation of the spectators. The film was inspired by Bijon Bhattacharya's Nabanno and self-reflexively it places Bijon
Bhattacharya as Gagan, the writer constructing a play within the film.

The partition of Bengal aggravated the crisis, as the East Bengal market for literature, films and drama was lost. Retrenchment, soaring prices, communal scare-mongering in the name of war between India and Pakistan, and finally the American Imperialist aggression in Korea dragged the Bengali stage and cinema to the brink of disaster. Most of the Bengali film houses were showing Bombay, Madras, and foreign films with the result that even the popular Bengali film ended with deficits. Moreover, at this time Bengal did not have touring cinema facilities. It is true that even amidst such scenario some significant films were being made in Bengali. Hiralal Sen and Motilal Sen made short films on contemporary events, especially Bengal partition. There were films by Bimal Rai, Debaki Bose and P. C. Barua. Yet Bengali cinema, as a whole, was sentimental in tone and avoided the urgent issues facing society.

III

Born in 1925, a time of political turmoil and subordination, Ghatak grew up amidst political awakening and Marxist uprising. His family atmosphere and the surroundings around charged him with a consciousness that was deeply political. In the aftermath of Japanese onslaught, British retreat, famine and communal riots in 1946, Ghatak joined active Marxist politics. Beginning as a short story writer he published several of his short stories in Desh, Parichey, Shanibarer Chitti and other leading magazines of Bengal. In 1948 he acted in the revised version of Nabanno. Nabanno revolutionized his way of thinking and served as a turning point in his life. It led him to a conviction that in
terms of immediate and spontaneous communication theater is much more effective than literature. And cinema with its mass appeal, he felt, could do wonders. Ghatak passionately participated in theater but cinema as a singularly powerful means of expressing the agony of the people haunted him. He states:

The ruthlessness of oppression, the reality of so many ills and miseries of life going rampant in our society, gave me a jolt and adequately motivated me to protest against all these. . . . I discovered myself and felt the urge to write stories . . . . Meanwhile I also brought out a magazine on the Marxist line from the mofussil town of Rajshahi, I was then a third year student. . . . At that time Nabanno came out and then the stream of my whole life took a different course. Nabanno came from there and stuck deep in mind.5

Later Ghatak paid a tribute to Nabanno acknowledging its deep influence in one of his articles, ‘Bijon Bhattacharya: Giver of New Life.’10 In 1948 Ghatak entered the movement of the Cine Technicians Association of Bengal (CTAB) as an activist and took a leading role in their activities. This was followed by a memorandum in 1949 on the state of the film industry in West Bengal for submission to the film enquiry committee. Their principal demand was the nationalization of the film industry. In the same year he made his first venture into cinema when he worked as assistant director and actor in Manoj Bhattacharya’s Tathapi. Soon he formed a theatre group named Natyachakra, disconnected himself from it to form another theatre group Behurupee along with some other artists and was involved in it for eleven months. In the meantime he participated in Nildarpan, Kalanka and Pathik under the direction of Bijon Bhattacharya and Tulsi Lahri. Between 1950 and 1952 Ghatak wrote Jwala, an analysis of the suicide wave in Calcutta, and Officer, a play inspired by Gogol’s Inspector General. He further worked as assistant director and actor in Nemai Ghosh’s Chinnamul, besides taking over the direction of Arup Katha from Nirmal De. The film however was abandoned. In 1952 the technicians studio was
founded by the retrenched members of the Ruparsree studio in the premises of the erstwhile Kali Film Studio. Ghatak, though he was an active participant in the process, refused to be a shareholder. In the same year he began directing his first film *Nagarik* (The Citizen), a cooperative venture with the IPTA workers. The film, completely Marxist in tone, was a history containing many chapters. Though completely submerged in Cinema, Ghatak continued to participate in theater. On the eve of the first general elections of the Lok Sabha Ghatak organized and acted in poster drama, street corner drama, extempore skits.

1952 witnessed the First International Film Festival. It opened a new world to the artists in India struggling to find a medium. The Italian New-realist cinema convinced the artists that film as a medium could both perceive and reflect reality. On the other hand the Russian School of film-making offered a different perspective. Ghatak found his affiliation in the Soviet School. It was his conversations with Podovkin and before that his readings of Eisenstein's *Film Form* and *Film Sense* and Kulushov's experiments that led him to understand that one of the fundamental components of film is editing and that cinema is not created but constructed shot by shot. He also learnt from Eisenstein that 'conflict' at several levels is central to both the theory of dialectics and to the film form. And this 'conflict' could be presented through the technique of montage. Further Eisenstein's thesis that in any proposition we can and must disclose as in a 'nucleus cell' the germs of all the elements of dialectics furthered his thinking on cinema. Eisenstein and Podovkin's theory in the field of cinema helped Ghatak in understanding the concept of 'Guignol' and the use of non-actors. Reading Eisenstein's essay on the Noh and Kabuki theatre of Japan, he understood as to how the Japanese School of
Cinema especially that of Mizoguchi and Kinguya is developed within the cultural matrix of the Japanese tradition. Moreover the Eisensteinian notion of a monistic ensemble especially in the context of the Kabuki theater (where the line of one sense does not simply accompany the other, the two are totally interchangeable, inseparable elements of a monistic ensemble) reinforced Ghatak's belief in the Epic form that formulates itself around similar formal configurations. Ghatak considered Eisenstein the greatest film theorist, and understood the fundamentals of cinema from him, although he writes that he was not influenced, chiefly because the Russian school of art was part of the 'agitprop' and Ghatak revolted against the idea of art turning propagandist. He chose a different medium of expression, a form that was deeply rooted in Indian culture and so had the ability to reach out subtly from within.

In 1953 Ghatak’s Dalil was voted the best production from West Bengal in All India IPTA Conference in Bombay. He was voted the best actor as well as the best director.

While rehearsing Necher Mahal, and in the process of staging Ispaat under the central squad of IPTA in 1954, differences emerged between Ghatak and the South Squad of IPTA. As a result he was forced to leave IPTA. This shook him completely and this traumatic experience later found an expression in Komal Gandhar. Nevertheless his faith in art as a medium of expression was left untouched. Soon inspired by Stanislavsky’s ‘Group Acting,’ Ghatak formed Group Theatre. He wrote and directed Sanko, dramatized Ha ja ba ra la and staged Bisarjan. In 1955 Ghatak ventured into the production of two documentary films Adivasion ka Jiban Srot and Bihar Ke Darshaniya Sthan. It was in the process of shooting the film on the tribals that he developed an
understanding of the tribal psyche that deeply influenced his art and its expression.

In 1956, the Communist Party framed charges against Ghatak and struck out his name from its membership. As a result his entire edifice seemed to crumble. He plunged himself deeper into work and directed *Musafiron ke Liya*, a play inspired by Gorky's *Lower Depths*. A little later in 1957-58 Ghatak produced *Ajantrik*, a film that reflected an emotional integration of the machine age, an assimilation, perceived especially in folk psyche. Ghatak, while commenting on *Ajantrik*, says: "Here was a story that sought to establish a new relationship in our literature-the very significant and inevitable relationship between man and machine." The film paid a tribute to the folk psyche that has the ability to assimilate the new. Following a similar paradigm, in 1957 he worked on a short film *Oraons*, on the tribals in Rani Khatanga village and Ranchi. Later in 1977 his article 'About Oraons' was published. His experience with the Oraons helped him to understand cyclic continuity of life and the fusion of human life with nature from an altogether different perspective.

With *Bari Theke Paliyo* (The Runaway From Home) in 1959, Ghatak brought the problematic of the refugee in terms of memory and amnesia on Indian Screen. The same year he worked on *Kate Ajanare*. Though he managed to edit seven reels yet the film was left incomplete.

1960-62 witnessed the completion of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The Cloud-Capped Star), *Komal Gandhar* (E Flat) and *Suberna Rekha* (The Golden River). It is in these films that his basic political line of thinking, as it was developing in his theater, got well formulated. He developed his thinking around the refugee,
formulating it amidst states of amnesia and states of homelessness and developed a style that was experimental. Through these films he asserted a form that belonged to the people, and that used the epic and melodramatic modes. In the years to follow, he produced several documentaries and short films. Among these were Scissors, an ad film, a film on his guru Ustad Alaudhin Khan, Fear, a film with the students of acting course in the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) and supervised the direction of Rendezvous. He also undertook the production of Bagalar Banga Darshan but the film was left incomplete.

It was during this period between 1964 and 1965 that Ghatak worked as the Vice Principal of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII). While interacting with students he further developed his thinking on cinema.

1965 saw the translation of Brecht's The Life of Galileo and between 1967-68 he translated Brecht's Caucasian Chalk Circle. Later in 1973 he wrote an article called "Brecht and Ourselves". Brecht's A Short Organum for the theatre influenced Ghatak as it reiterated his thinking on the epic and the melodramatic modes.

The years 1967 to 1972 saw him making several documentary and short films. These include Scientist of Tomorrow, Puruliar Chhou Nirtya (Chhou Dance Of Purulia), an analysis of the Chhou tradition that later found a reflection in Jukti Takko Ar Gappo. He then directed, Amar Lenin (My Lenin), a film on the impact of Lenin on Indians, especially in Bengal; Yieh Kuin (The Question), a film on understanding the communal psyche, Durbar Gati Padma (There flows Padma, the Mother), on Bangladesh, ‘Mukti Yudh’, and a film on Indira Gandhi’s historical meeting with Sheikh Mujibar Rahman and the issue of Bangladesh; the film was abandoned later.
on. He also undertook the filming of *Ranga Golam* but the project was left incomplete.

While confined in the mental hospital for alcoholism in 1969, Ghatak staged *Sei Meye* with doctors and patients as participants.

With the completion of *Titas Ekti Nadir Nam* (*A River Called Titash*) in 1973 Ghatak further developed the epic form. *Titash* was closely followed by *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* (*Reason, Argument and Story*) in 1974. *Jukti*, Ghatak’s last film, reformulated his political thinking. The film attempted to understand the failure of the Naxalite Movement. It also adopted a form that was completely radical.

Concurrently Ghatak wrote and directed *Jwalanta*, his last play, and worked on a film on *Ram Kinkar Baaj*. The unfinished film survives today as Ghatak’s only color film. The background sound track was on the point of being taken up just before he passed away in 1976 at the age of fifty.

Besides working on theatre and cinema Ghatak wrote several articles, illustrating and formulating his philosophical and artistic thesis. Most of these articles revolve around cinema, in terms of form, content and the problematics of blending Indian tradition within the film form. He also wrote several screen plays that reflect his basic arguments. He once wrote a script based on a Bengali folk tale in which he states: "I have discarded all dialogues and have used about 25 songs apart from several poems." He went to the other extreme in another script which he had proposed to film in Bombay: "This will not only be devoid of songs, but will have no dialogues either—only distorted voices and background music. It is the story of a deaf
mite child of the Koli tribe of Maharashtra."\textsuperscript{14} The film script proposed to understand an experiential subjectivity. Immediately before his death he had planned to shoot a film called \textit{Shey Bishnupriya} in which he had wanted to present the complete breakdown of moral values, especially among the younger generation of today.\textsuperscript{15} He had also written a script based on Kalidas’s \textit{Kumara Sambhavam} blending it with contemporary times. Ghatak wrote several screen plays, the significant among these are \textit{Lajja, Echoes from Vietnam in Bengal, Those Forgotten Ones, Janmabhumi, and Chaturanga}. Some of the screen plays that were accepted for filming are \textit{Madhumati, Musafir, Swaralipi, Kumani Mon, Dwiper Nam Tiyarang,} and \textit{Raj Kanya} directed by Bimal Roy, Hrishikesh Mukhopadhyay, Asit Sen, Chitra Rath, Guru Bagchi, and Sunil Bandyopadhyay respectively.\textsuperscript{16}

Believing that art is directly related to people, Ghatak felt that cinema cannot but be engaged, committed to be worthy of its mission. The relevance of cinema, he believed, lies in its portrayal of the burning issues and as art is related to people, it simply cannot operate in a void but must find its roots in the throbs and aspirations of the people. He writes:

\begin{quote}
In our case it is the Indian man and his environment which should be the focus of our attention. It is with this standpoint that I judge not only cinema but all works of art. That which helps man is valid, that which does not is not valid however much trappings it may have. At the same time I am not a supporter of slogans. That will be an infantile disorder in my opinion.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

He further states:

\begin{quote}
To me it is precisely contemporary reality, with its innumerable and unwieldy patterns and cross-currents of forces that needs abstraction.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

But the intervention by an artist, he believed, had to be from within the people’s modes of expression rather than from without. And for this the artist’s first responsibility was to learn from them and to speak in their medium. Thus the artist
must portray the daily acts of heroism of people. Agreeing with Tagore, Ghatak asserted that all art must be primarily truthful and then only beautiful. Though there is no such thing as the eternal truth, yet every artist, he felt, has to learn his own private truth through a painful personal process and this is what one has to convey. In the ultimate analysis, he felt, all art must confirm and affirm life. It is art's responsibility that however soiled and poisonous the curse, 'we have to emerge out.'

Beginning with the premises of commitment to project the complexities surrounding around the contemporary reality through the medium of abstraction, Ghatak formulated his philosophical treatise by penetrating into the constellation of 'our national culture-complex.' For in order to locate our national culture, one has to look into one's tradition with a scientific temperament. He writes:

I have strongly felt that our Nation's films must have a separate identity. I have constantly been in search of such a language that will be able to give an internal, culture-specific expression to the pain, happiness and exploitation of our country's people. In order to search for such an expression and language it is necessary to retrace our past.

In the same interview he further states:

I can just say that by overstepping our past, by forgetting our past, we cannot prosper. My past is my past and I have taken birth in this specific part of the world. My past is a thing of pride for me. Without strongly rooting myself in my past I cannot think in terms of reaching my future. It is only through an understanding of my past that I can align myself with the most significant stream of line of human civilization.

He, thus, believed that in order to do something 'one must stand on one's ground, only then can one plumb the true depths.' Hence the primary necessity for Ghatak was to root his work within a tradition, so that when the contemporary reality was presented within folk forms that are an inherent part of the folk psyche, the mythic consciousness, the work would instantaneously reach out to the people as it would then serve as
an itinerant to their psychic patterns. As a medium for his art form he explored two significant folk forms, the Epic and the Melodramatic forms. The exploration and adaptation of these modes, he felt, was important for two reasons. One, the assertion of these forms would lead to a national cultural assertion, to a separate national identity of art vis-a-vis the hegemonic orders of expression. Secondly, as most of the Indian narratives had found an expression in these forms, a reworking within them would lead to a psychic integration wherein the contemporary would fuse with the people’s consciousness.

This assertion of the Melodramatic and the Epic forms as the markers of a national identity and culture is significant. Unlike several artists, Ghatak rejected the western school of realism as a mark of modernity; he insisted on exploring forms that actually belonged to people with their specific codes. He asserts, "the film goers know that they are enjoying a story they know it is not real." In one of his articles he writes that the basic folk forms are always kaleidoscopic, pageant-like, relaxed, discursive, and that their contents have been very well known for thousands of years. And always, music retains a decisive part in them. The question that Ghatak as an artist posed was: Can Indian cinema come into its own without assimilating this folk attitude at least for a period? One of the examples that he gives in support of his argument is of the Athens of circa 450 B.C., the age when the artist could and did draw from the common mythic fund of Homeric legends. In the same manner the Indians too are an epic people, he affirmed, ‘who like to sprawl and are not much involved in the story-intrigues, rather they like to be retold the same myths and legends again and again.’ He further states: "We as a people, are not much sold on the ‘what’ of the thing, but the ‘why’, and ‘how’ of it
and this is the epic attitude, it is a living tradition in our country." Thus he felt that we must orientate our entire creative endeavour along the channel of epic mentality.

Posing the question of modernity in art, he believed that there is no such thing as 'Modern' in art. There are forms and forms—as art eternally goes on changing forms and all kinds of forms have been applied, experimented with and exhausted and an artist constantly only re-invents them. As Ghatak rules out the notion of modernity in art. As epic as a form has the ability to incorporate the contemporary and assimilate within its form all that comes its way, for Ghatak it becomes the most significant mode of expression. Besides he felt that the epic dominates the Indian subconscious. When Ghatak reflects on the epic form, he does not merely perceive it through the Brechtian perspective wherein the notion of disjunction and thus intervention emerges as the most significant aspect but also views it as a 'Mahakavya' where several strands of 'kavya' run simultaneously. The epic for him is thus a genre of continuities and multiple apertures highlighted within a tradition where the basic mental images and contours are shaped and formed by the epic mentality.

Besides the epic, it was melodrama as a form that became his medium of expression. He writes:

There are many genres. One accepts melodrama as one. . . . I think a truly national cinema will emerge from the much abused form of melodrama when truly serious and considerate artists will bring the pressure of their entire intellect upon it. After all Mizoguchi and Kurosawa and Kinugasa took the Noh and Kabuki in their hands and squeezed supremely personal statements out of them. The prospect is exciting, is it not.

He reiterates: "I am not afraid of using any number of coincidences or melodramatic sequences while I am going to arrange a story in order to express my ideas. Melodrama is a birth right, it is a form. I think I'll have to do it otherwise my
contention will not be strongly expressed."27 Ghatak’s intercession within the melodramatic mode develops it on two significant planes. Ghatak develops many of his sequences within the melodramatic mode but at their most crucial melodramatic point he cuts, subverting the central positions of melodrama. This intervention within the mode is developed in *Meghe Dhake Tara* across several syntagmas. When Nita realizes Sanat’s betrayal, the sequence develops on the melodramatic plane but the very next shot depicts Nita’s face superimposed onto the empty courtyard of the house. Similarly when Gita informs Nita of her decision to marry Sanat, the sequence working within the melodramatic framework cuts and subsequently develops on a different plane. In *Suberna Rekha* Ghatak works within the stereotype in his depiction of Sita’s elopement with Abhiram but before the sequence completely develops he cuts it with the intervention of the scroll. Similarly Sita’s suicide, a sequence with latent melodramatic potentialities, is instantaneously subverted.

On another plane melodrama as a form is used to carry the discourse from the emotive plane into the intellective domain. The intellective in Ghatak is developed through the juxtaposition of several parallel lines of thought that apparently seem melodramatic. In *Komal Gandhar*, Anasuya’s discourse is developed through the discourse of the exiled inherent in the legend of *Shakuntalam*. In *Meghe Dhake Tara*, when Nita is asked by her father to leave (one of the most melodramatic sequences in the film), Ghatak intercedes and plays the ‘Gauri geet’ and the ‘Uma geet’ that expresses the changing forms of patriarchy within the changing forms of class oppression. In *Suberna Rekha* Hariprasad’s discourse is developed melodramatically in the Patricia sequence but within the problematics of the sacrifice of Nachiketas in the *Katha*
Melodrama thus is developed inversely in Ghatak as a principle of abstraction.

Apparently the melodramatic and the epic modes are contradictory but the theory of co-incidence as a conscious theory is central to both. Moreover, both the epic and the melodramatic forms do away with the processes of individualization and express their statements through concepts and symbols, through the principle of abstraction. This theory of abstraction is significant in the context of Ghatak. In Ghatak's conception of art form, abstraction as a principle attains the highest stature.

Basing his theoretical position within Indian paradigms of narration Ghatak evolves his own thesis of art. In the process of evolving it he acknowledges the impact of several artists and their works. The significant among these are Eisenstein, Podovkin, Donvzhenkho, Sergir Yuktenvich, Krakatit, Otakav Varva, Mizoghuchi, Kinjuya, Ozu, Cacyoannis, Kozinstev, Bunuel and Fellini. Further he acknowledges Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* and Bunuel's *Virideana* as two masterpieces of world cinema and elaborates that it is through *Virideana* that Bunuel has blown to pieces the entire Roman Catholic Dogma. Bela Balaza's *Theory of Film*, Ivor Montagu's *Collection of Film Articles* and Godard's ability to use several modes too influenced him considerably. The works of Eric Newmann, Jung and Frazer helped him in developing his theory of the Mother image and of the collective unconscious. Tagore, he felt, had already given an expression to most of his feelings, and he acknowledged Bimal Rai and Ustad Alludin Khan to be his gurus in the field of cinema and music respectively. He admired some of the works of Debaki Bose and declared four novels from Bengal as the great masterpieces.
These were Tagore's *Chatturanga*, Bakim Chatterjee's *Raj Singha*, Manik Banerjee's *Putul Nacha Ekti Katha*, and Tara Shankar Banerjee's *Gana Devta*. Further, Ghatak considered Bibhutibhushan Banerjee as the poet and visionary of rural Bengal. He writes, "I had not been moved so strongly by anything till I read *Pather Panchali* and *Aporajito* . . . . Even today, when I read the last few lines of *Aporajito*, I am surprised and astonished. No other writer could explain Hindu philosophy so deeply. How simply and effortlessly has he brought out something so serious and abstract. I have virtually derived answers to all my artistic preoccupations from him." Further Ghatak in one of his articles acknowledges Satyajit Ray’s *Pather Panchali* as a great masterpiece.

An ability to synthesize the contemporary with the traditional modes was greatly valued by Ghatak. A recession into the past merely to exalt the past held no meaning for him. It was in this perspective that he valued O’Neill’s *Strange Interlude*, Strindberg’s *Dream Play* and Brecht’s *Organon*. Brecht’s theoretical thesis in the *Organon*, according to him, was the most brilliant attempt of its kind—synthesis on a higher level wherein the past tradition is resolved with a sense of the contemporary. He acknowledges the influence that Brecht’s *Organon* had on him. It influenced him because here he saw a synthesis of older forms with contemporary concerns. Besides he strongly felt that Brecht’s notion of the epic was based on ‘reasonings similar to ours’—especially because folk melodies of both the East and the West play a vital and an inevitable role in his scheme of things. Moreover, Brecht, too, had built his epic attitude in the minds of people through his theories of alienation (verfreudung) and this epic attitude Ghatak felt ‘is still a living tradition in our country’ as it is a part of the
Though an artist has the tendency to be influenced by certain works yet Ghatak strongly believed that an artist must learn to digest influences, so that a process of assimilation could take place. He writes that despite all influences whenever he would produce a play or a film he would not tie himself down to a particular theory, he would rather experiment and evolve a form of his own. He constantly felt the pangs of an artist groping to find the most popular expression for the theme at hand. In the process he tried to experiment with forms of story, treatment and styles of taking images.

Agreeing with Godard, he believed that anything which seems to an artist to be capable of conveying his message is entirely valid—be it a song or dance or newspaper headlines or commentaries or just about anything, artistic validity being the only criterion. Hence, the use of both the folk and classical music was valid for him as long as they helped him to make his statement authentically. He asserts that all forms from extreme Naturalism to extreme Expressionism are totally valid if the artist’s thesis and temperament demand them. Believing that film is not a form but has forms, he felt that it should be approached from the point of view of emotion aroused and intellect sharpened. And since an artist creates for the people, the use of any form including the lyric is valid as long as it expresses the contention of the artist. He states: "But I do use songs and will do it if I find that they help advance my ideas. Frankly I am ready to use any weapon that I have." He further says, "In the perspective of our present day society I wish to use all these elements according to my ideas and thoughts. I will use them to serve my purpose."
Making no sharp distinction between the documentary mode and the feature film, Ghatak believed that in the truly creative sense, the documentary is an attitude. The truth lies in reality and the camera is eminently capable and uniquely suited to record physical reality in all its varied aspects. Ultimately, one can adopt any form but the principal aspect of all art form, according to Ghatak, is to arrive at a level of synthesis where divergent forms and issues could come together. Essentially he felt it was important to objectify an art object and to convert it into an abstraction. He writes: "To me it is precisely contemporary reality with its innumerable and unwieldy patterns and crosscurrents of forces that needs abstraction."33 When the artist sets himself the task of propounding certain fundamental traits of that reality, abstraction becomes a must. Abstraction has the ability to cull the essence of the generally prevailing aspects of many things by leaving aside the individual traits of things. Human brain, Ghatak believed, was incapable of encompassing anything in physical reality in its entirety, as the object in reality starts in the brain a subjective cerebration, however rudimentary the case may be. Hence, he believed that one cannot think, feel or react without abstraction. Thus, when one is working in terms of symbols, motifs, psychic undercurrents, in the form of cultural specific codes followed by people belonging to the same cultural complex, one is essentially dealing in abstraction. For he believed that the collective unconscious was present even before human life evolved, and so the deepest feelings of humankind find their genesis in it. The basis of spontaneous reaction lies in the archetypes, which have the ability to control human reaction to different situations. These archetypes often reflect themselves through symbols and images that are often transformed into conceptual structures by an
artist. Thus in the formation of the poetic process, Ghatak felt that if one is consciously trying to lead an image to its conclusion, that does not make up an archetype, at best it creates an allegory. It is only when some images develop as an inevitable consequence and again become inconsequential in the process of turning into symbols, that the archetypal force is born.

Ghatak further connects abstraction with the subjectivity of the artist: "For the moment an artist selects a frame, lays out his plan of montage, he has already started reshaping his raw material. His soul has entered there." This furthered his belief that a single composition is as infinite as any Senecan tragedy as it is bound by the conscious and the unconscious of the artist. Elaborating his concept, he states: "But normally in cinema, the subjective element comes into play by way of straight objective shots. The subjective in it is born of the Maker's vision. He impregnates this objective piece of recordings with tensions and connotations born out of his conscious and unconscious." For he believed that as a child grows up he/she becomes an heir to the values or the lack of them, of his/her milieu, and that these archetypes continue to determine his emotions, sentiments and behaviour to an amazing degree. Hence, to all artists, this storehouse is an endless source of all creation. All appreciation and reaction is born out of the social unconscious, as all fairy tales, all fantasies, all tragedies come from the same source. Thus, according to Ghatak, as art is basically subjective and as all subjectivity is formed by the collective unconscious, all art basically, at its deepest form, is an objective abstraction. The principle of abstraction is thus a connecting chain, that connects through concepts and symbols. In one of his interviews he states, that once while he
was teaching at the Film Institute, some of his students had questioned him on experimentation in cinema. Answering them he had said: "Only the human brain has the ability to develop its stream of thought into an invisible abstraction that gradually develops and progresses. There are only a few personalities like Eisenstein who are capable of bringing about a significant change in terms of abstraction in the field of human thought and knowledge." In order to propound his proposition in terms of abstraction Ghatak experimented with several forms.

Besides abstraction, Ghatak believed an artist must attain a level of synthesis of form and content. Such a synthesis became essential for him as an artist. He believed that if an artist is dealing with an Indian reality, he/she has to code the work within a form that is essentially Indian. As the form has to belong to the cultural matrix of the people, it has to be folk. Contemporaneity in Ghatak's films is blended with traditional forms. He asserts that the contemporary reality, the daily acts of heroism in that reality, could be dealt with from the vantage points of past and future. And this form of dealing with reality he developed at several levels; both in terms of juxtaposing the form with content and developing it at a different level or in terms of presenting the present but situating it within the ambience of myth and legend and thus developing the discourse simultaneously at a different temporal zone. It was not important for him to crawl back and exalt the past; he had to resolve it with a sense of contemporary in a synthesis on a higher level. Creating a synthesis of form and content, wherein the form itself is content as it transforms itself into a field of problematics, he upheld the significance of form. However, he writes, the basic element of a work is its content. The content primarily has to be authentic, for if the content is authentic
and if the artist is alert and clearly aware of the statement that he wants to make, then the form will evolve on its own. Thus, the form has to emerge from the content and not be externally superimposed. Such a form will not only be beautiful and authentic but will decide in the right perspective all its significant components like sound, narrative and technique. Thinking in terms of the form that his work was to take, he writes:

Each one of my films is quite different from the other, though I fear my personality and inclinations are in all of them. From the compositional point of view, all the films have divergent balancing principles thought to be inherent in the theme. On the sound track, including the music, I have tried to weave different patterns.

Evolving his form Ghatak insisted that the film maker must make an attempt to bring together divergent elements so that along with retaining their differences they can make a combined impact. The ideal state, according to him, was when all the elements can retain their differences, so that no one element becomes dominant over the other. Hence in his scheme of things he conceptualized an image making its own statement, sound its own and together they would make a strong impact and yet retain their differences. Believing that music is one of the most eminent aspects of cinema, he conceived a cinema wherein through sound the director develops the film on a parallel level, a different level.

Strongly believing in the significance of sound, Ghatak felt that many a time it is silence that blends a different dimension as stillness adds a new dimension to movement. He elaborates that if you want to underline the movement aspect of cinema then many a time it becomes necessary to concentrate and focus on the motionlessness of cinema as well. Many a time a full stop and steadiness bestows a strange intense effect, as sometimes
complete non-dramatization gives the next moment's dramatization a completely new dimension. Similarly silence and stillness gives the film a deep meaning. According to Ghatak, the most eminent elements in a work are its nuances. He writes, "the elusive, fleeting nuances—they contain the life spark."38 It is only through the development and the presentation of these nuances that a work is rooted in both art and tradition.

In none of his works did he uphold the idea of slogan mongering or the talk of big, high principles as art. For him art meant meditation, deep penetration, humility, awareness of the magnitude of the task and a total feeling of oneness with the problems at hand; all great art has these in abundance, he contented.39 He had no objection if an artist felt the urge of putting forward a solution. But he believed that more often it is important to pose a problem and leave the matter there. For an artist, though a political being, yet needs to approach the subject from a different perspective; art, according to him, has its own modes of expression, which are exclusive to it.

Ghatak counter-reacted to the argument that film is an improved form of other arts. Considering cinema no better or worse than other arts, he upheld that film has a different language and that is what needs to be developed.

Though he rooted his work in the contemporary political crisis and analysis yet he thought in terms of philosophy and Indian tradition. Ancient Indian life as a theme for cinema attracted and involved him. Ghatak refuted the view that a return to one's roots and tradition was unprogressive, or that it was a reinforcement of certain outdated paradigms. He believed that the ancient and historical images that he had been presenting in his films were in the beginning the symbols of
valuable beliefs. It was only later that the minds of men contaminated and decontextualised these values. He believed that myth and therefore civilization is a poetic supernormal image conceived like all poetry in depth but susceptible to interpretations on all levels. All his films are rooted strongly in the mother image and revolve around its varied aspects. Further almost all his films are underlined by a Sadhu image, more often in the form of a Baul, as he has "a deep connection with the people's life." Similarly he writes that "I have used the folk songs with the intention that people may know the condition and the context of people three thousand or three hundred years back and are in a position to compare and know their state with our state in our given context." He further states that it was in order to give an expression to the mental state of women in our society as the most oppressed and marginalised that he constantly made use of Bengal's 'Uma Geet' and 'Gauri Geet.'

Though it is the theme of exile and division that runs throughout his films yet all his films end on a positive note, with the image of a survivor continuing to struggle for his/her ideals. Ghatak writes that for him the most important line of thought was Tagore's, "The faith of mankind overwhelms evil."

All his creative endeavour was directed in search of a language that would be both archetypal and realistic. He writes:

Yet I do not know from where, an ideal has gradually emerged in front of me. Like the Isopanishad, Kathopanishad.

A language which says little, which is by itself illuminative. Its allusions do not carry weight but are sharp. In reference it does not burden but refreshes memory because its suggestions, through perceptions and images are archetypal. A language which can hold the entire wood in a dominant manner. Apparently dry, but from within like the mango from Malda, succulently ripe.

... In cinema it is necessary to speak in this language ... such language is born in the
Consciousness of the one who does not speak unless life impels him to. How unless one is tremendously angry, deeply in love, joyous or in great sorrow, can such a primordial language emerge?

Thinking in terms of a language that would be a psychic component of the people and would carry the weight of their dreams and fantasies and yet would be utterly communicable, Ghatak felt that cinema must speak in such a language. But he was aware that this language would emerge only when life itself impelled the artist to speak. Further it would emerge only through an intra-cultural dialogue of the spectators and the artist and for this dialogue to emerge the basic pre-requisite, he believed, was culture and roots.

But what of an artist who at the beginning of his creativity loses his roots?

Ghatak poses this problem situating himself within the historicity of partition: "I have dared hope this. I shall struggle, until my energy gives out, to capture this language. But I am obstructed. By not being able to stand on my grounds. When and how will I be able to gain control on another ground? I have to return to my mother's womb in search of its source." Further he writes, "At the start of a creative career, however, when one is beginning to work, if one goes bankrupt of the provision of his past what is he to do? . . . A work which is pastless, unsupported, 'airy nothing,' is no work at all. But who will give me back my past? . . . But I am a film maker. No one has lost like me: what I have seen I am not able to show." Believing that it was the unconscious dynamics of a writer that determined his art form, Ghatak intensely felt that the roop-katha (fantasy) of his childhood had been completely eliminated, for what he had seen in East Bengal he no longer could find in
West Bengal. He writes: "I have lost that forever, and without that I have not the ability to create a new roopkatha out of my reality," the world of fantasy, "the simple tale that silences argument." 48

Could he undo the historicity of this event?
Could he reconcile with it?

Along with several Marxists, Ghatak strongly believed that independence was fake and was actually a sham. Though the Britishers had left yet the model that the Indian government had adopted was no better than that of the imperialists'. Moreover independence was made possible through the division of the nation and this he felt was not only unnecessary but absolutely brutal. In one of his interviews while analyzing the situation of partition Ghatak says:

The British empire in India at that time was finished or totally broken down. The economy had collapsed because of the war. They were finished but for the Americans. Churchill, all these heroes had collapsed. From one end came the episode of Subash Chander Bose that gave big publicity in the people's mind, his image was working vehemently ... the people were so tense with anger. Then the 1942 August movement. That shook everything, then the 'Naval Mutiny' in Bombay, then the 'Air force Mutiny' in Madras. Nobody knows about these. The Britishers suppressed everything about these mutinies. They were at that time in a completely shaky condition. If we could have just continued the fight for some few more days, could have continued, sustained our vocal protest for some more days and could have sacrificed a few more lives, we could have compelled them to leave the country. But this deal/alliance/pact with Mountbatten, with the Britishers for power. It was tantamount to making some kind of a deal. They betrayed the country's whole National liberation movement. Gandhi was against it 'but' our National Liberation movement got hold of the seats in the name of independence. That's what I am trying to say, I have earlier also spoken about it and I repeat again, I scream and I will do so everywhere. 49

Further he felt that the division of Bengal and Punjab was shocking as it shattered the economic and political life of the people. This politics and economics was the cause of a certain cultural segregation to which he never reconciled. In one of his interviews he says: "I always thought in terms of cultural integration... They played ducks and drakes with this country by causing balkanisation... I have no role in changing the
historicity of this event."  

He restates; "I just kept on watching what was happening, how the behaviour pattern was changing due to this great betrayal of national liberation."  

He further states, "Being a Bengali from East Pakistan, I have seen untold miseries inflicted on my people in the name of Independence which is a fake and a sham." As Ghatak refused to reconcile himself with the political-cultural disintegration of the country, the need for cultural integration forms the basic theme in his works. Moreover his films set an inquiry into the consequences of Indian Independence. In *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo*, which forms the culminating point of Ghatak's oeuvre, he reacted most violently to the untold miseries inflicted on the people in the name of Independence. He states that in *Jukti* he had tried to portray several different aspects of this pseudo-independence.

At the end of his life while analyzing the chaos caused by the division of the nation, the displacement of the people in the name of independence and several other movements, including the Bangladesh Mukti Yudh of 1971 and the Naxalite movement, Ghatak realized that despite all efforts of people to bring about a positive system, all struggle had culminated either into 'gundaism' or had resulted in complete frustration. Sooner or later he felt that only two paths would be left open before us: "one is straight fascism, the other to do something in the Leninist way."
Notes


3. Ibid., p. 75.


5. Ibid., p. 116.

6. Ibid., p. 167.


13. Ritwik Ghataka, 'Interview (1)' in *Cinema and I*, p. 72.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., p. 76

16. Details regarding Ghataka's numerous political and artistic activities have been derived from Ritwik Ghataka, *Cinema and I*, pp. 105-111.


21. Ibid.


25. Ibid., pp. 42-43.


32. Ibid., p.106.


35. Ibid.


38. Ibid.


42. Ibid., pp. 14-15.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., pp. 13.


46. Ibid., p. 20.

47. Ibid., p. 19.

48. Ibid.


51. Ritwik Ghatak, 'Interview (2)' in *Cinema and I*, p. 80.

52. Ritwik Ghatak, 'Interview (1)' in *Cinema and I*, p. 76.