



## **“Nanabidho” (Myriad): A Rediscovery of Sundry Bengali Identities through Lenses**

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### **Abstract**

One of the most contested arena of today’s socio-cultural political scenario is the battle between several identity formations, be that individual or microcosms of several individual identities. Hence, when we talk about a Bengali identity per se, it becomes difficult to conjure up a monolithic set of features that is congruous with the term “Bengali”. Various strands of geographic, economic, political factors and their push and pulls have continuously contributed to the carving out of a heterogeneous identity structure that has been constitutive of an abstract “Bangaliana.” But does this “Bangaliana” or the essence of being a Bengali equally permeate to different strata of a society that inhabit in a territory that we precisely call Bengal? As a way to comprehend the mobility of these diverse features that are collectively associated with a somewhat homogeneous Bengali essence, we have chosen to look into some iconic Bengali movies of late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, in the beginning, this paper seeks to explore and accommodate all those accidental evidences of the evolution of the Bengali identity that has been captured by the directors in those films while their intention was not to invoke any monolithic Bengali identity but to celebrate, encapsulate and showcase different tensions, conflicts, and moments of joy and happiness through their lenses. In the latter half of the paper we focus on the 21<sup>st</sup> century rendition of several parochial societal customs which manifests itself through the several urban Kolkata elite family circles represented in these immensely popular Bengali serials. Hence, all these seemingly disconnected elements mingle together in this paper to present Bengali identity (as seen through the selected cinema and television representations spanning across a wide timeline from 1950s to late 2010s), as a tangible and still evolving social phenomenon which didn’t exist from times immemorial but rather underwent and is still undergoing a process of efflorescence.

### **Keywords**

Bangaliana, babu, heterogeneity, movies, serials

Bengali identity in 20th and 19th century had undergone a transformation with the steady coagulation of the British imperial presence. A more rural and localized dimensions of many identities based upon its own geographical and cultural backdrop was somewhat adopted and re-interpreted by the upcoming middle class intelligentsia of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal. With the introduction of Indian market and economy to the largely competitive and industrialized market economy along with the array of internal economic policies, this period saw a haphazard urbanization of a select few strata of the society. Even though the urban and rural spaces of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal weren't meticulously separated from each other and there was a continual ebb and flow of cultural interactions between the two worlds, the facet of the varied nuances of "Bengaliana" (the essence of a particular Bengali-ness) came to be more closely examined and scrutinized with the norms and conducts of the affluent middle-class Bengali traders and businessmen called "Babus". Thus this paper seeks to break that boundary of high and low culture of Bengal, of an elite and subaltern Bengal. Through analysing some of the iconic movies of 20<sup>th</sup> century and some Bengali television serials of early 21st century, this paper tries to accommodate all those scattered evidences of the construction and deconstruction of a tangible "Bengaliana" which was manifested unintentionally through celluloid as well as television screens.

The paper begins with Satyajit Ray's three films *Pather Panchali*, *Charulata* and *Mahanagar*. Coming from an erstwhile landed class (Chatterjee *Indian Cinema* 5), the director himself was not that well introduced to the rural dynamics of Bengal but as the world saw afterwards, his film *Pather Panchali* became a landmark for celebration of life as it traverses through its innocence and hardships and also the first movie to aesthetically represent the small and unobserved delicacies of childhood in rural Bengal. However in this paper, the main focus of discussion surrounding his movies is to depict a more gendered view of the social life of rural and urban Bengal.

Women, who borne the brunt of the tag of a 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-colonial reactionary traditionalism, increasingly kept on relating themselves to the identity of a private domain, away from the humdrums of an outer world. Just like a slave loses its previous identity after undergoing through a process of social death (Patterson 54), a wife of colonial Bengal, predominantly urban, also went through the same procedures. The only difference being, in the former case, coercion was much more expressive in nature, whereas in case of an Indian Wife, it was much more subtle to arouse public sentiment in favour of it.

This private sphere then relaxes itself in the mind of its only inhabitant- the women. The home then gradually starts forming a central part in the building of the memory of them. The architecture, the interior designs become as vibrant as the souls inhabiting them. If a colonial urban upper class house architecture is to be closely looked at, then the high walls, windows and the vivid distinction between inner parts of the house and the outer part itself manifests itself through several western concept of living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom and other classifications of room automatically deepens the line between the insider and the outsider. However, in an economically backward family, this distinction as we will see in the subsequent discussion, is much more fluid, be it urban or rural world. Similarly, the idea of family and emotional necessities undergo metamorphosis when situated differently.

The main protagonist in the *Pather Panchali* maybe a male member, but the dominant presence of female character Sarbajaya gives a different tone to the film. The house shown in the film in it is a crippled world by itself, with the kitchen and “dalan” (open corridor) at one side, the room of the elderly aunt in one corner. All this opens to the central courtyard which has a “tulasi tala” (a cemented isolated basement carrying a tulsi plant which is worshipped by Indian women). Sarbajaya at one point of time while arguing with her elderly sister-in-law, Indir Thakuran, proudly warns her not to steal anything from “her” kitchen. The sense of belonging to that walled space was very relatable to the general psyche of women in colonial Bengal. However, the material conditions of the family did not really support the fancy of stark intellectual distinction between the man and the woman, Hence, Harihar, her husband, is often seen to come and sit behind Sarbajaya in the kitchen chatting with her about the economic fortunes and misfortunes that plagued his everyday life. They hope and aspire together, Sarbajaya clearly mentions in one of the scenes about her equal share in the possession of the house, unlike the common trends of the society back then and even now. While Harihar burdens himself with the economic dilemmas of his family, Sarbajaya is equally burdened being the moral backbone of the family. A contrasting example can be seen in the neighbouring Zamindar house itself. No male members of that family were visible throughout the film, perhaps because the problems which concerned the house were extremely feminine.

The life of an urban upper class woman, a wife of intellectual, is strikingly different. The immobility, stagnancy of life bores the woman. The essentialities of good marriages also thus varied in these families. Here, marital bonds exist side by side with this emphasis on respect and avoidance between spouses (Allendorf 6). For example

Ghulam Murshid in his book 'Reluctant Debutante' had very wisely attributed the rise of male interest in giving birth to female education movements to the need of creating a liaison between the intellectual gap of husband and wife. Bhupati who endorsed high enlightened values was completely reluctant and inattentive towards fulfilling those in the domestic space. The ambition of running an English newspaper killed his family time. The opera glasses used by Charulata hence were used to gaze upon elements of outer world in a lonesome afternoon, as it was used on her husband who was as distant as the outer world. Moreover Partha Chatterjee's intellect provides insight to the concept of spiritual purity attached to the inner domain or the home which was declared by nationalism as "its sovereign territory" (Chatterjee *The Nation and Its Fragments* 6) Hence, the more respectable the family, the more close to the highest social status and national glory, the more conservative was the attitude towards the women of the house and more was the unsatisfied marital life. Elements of love, compatibility, and understanding got replaced with respect, distance and touchwood. "Ardhangini" (The other half) was no longer an internal part of the relationship, but an external worshipper of the same! Even if our paper will eventually talk about the two comedy films in the latter half, but when it comes to conjugality, the sweet relationship between Rajanibabu and his wife in the beginning scenes of Share Chuattor is bound to catch a prominent spot in our discussion. While it was prevalent in Bengali households, that men and children will eat first and then the women will follow, the norm doesn't break here obviously, but Rajanibabu eats his meal only when his wife agrees to eat a portion of it shared so adorably by her husband.

As per the division of labour is concerned in Charulata's family, there was no such financial instability in the house. The servant was there to do the household chores. The distant relationship between the servant and the master or mistress in this time will change eventually as we shall see in Share Chuattor in a different, more democratic social setting of a boarding house. Charulata was like a deity confined to her own spheres, sacred and delicate. In Mahanagar, the delicate efficacy of traditional woman was highly contradicted when Arati, in order to help her husband who worked unbearably for subsistence, stepped out of the domestic space to work as a sales girl. The first step towards liberation, (if at all at the initiation) was not acceptable to any woman of the time. Her only identity was her husband. Thus when Subrata asked Arati to sign the application letter to the company, Arati was taken aback and hesitant. In a trembling conscious way she then signed the letter. This perplexed gesture completely changed to a satisfactory

sigh when he signed the register while taking the first salary in her work place. Here, the economic burden was shared equally by the two, unlike *Pather Panchali*. Another celebratory moment was when Subrata and Arati was having their meals together, sitting side by side, before setting off to work. These features were absolutely uncommon back in those days. Despite some initial psychological bickering after Subrata lost his bank job, at the end they both aspired to get some work in the cosmos of the city. This film can thus be seen as an attempt where for the first time a woman could decide, through many hurdles whatsoever, the course of her own life! This joint venture was an enigma within the chaos of material world, male-female, public-private, home-world division! However, the question, as raised by Simon De Beauvoir, as to whether economic independence of woman meant liberation from social binds stays tuned. Thus, Arati had to clarify that she had not changed after taking the job and she had been and was only Subrata's wife and no one else. But, let's rejoice by taking one step at a time. Thus, Ray who did not proceed towards finalizing a script unless given confirmation by his wife Bijoya Ray successfully depicted the mutual family and society dynamics in this film. However, the women from the third story of *Kolkata 71* by Mrinal Sen weren't that fortunate. The widowed mother is compelled to send her daughter to see the "babus" of the mess flats in the then Kolkata to earn some money which when discovered by the elder sister of the family leads to a rampant conflict between the daughter and her mother. Thus, eventually, the concept of motherhood which is otherwise so hauled in other movies of the time here is presented with an altogether different layer. Due to utmost poverty the mother knows no family ties, ethics or moralities and goes to whatever extent to make ends meet!

If we take a closer look at the costume design of the three female characters of *Pather Panchali*, *Charulata* and *Mahanagar*, the dichotomy is bound to catch our attention. In *Pather Panchali*, obviously due to declining economic condition, the ornamentation normally attached to the feminine is less vivid, as compared to the urban lower class female character Arati in *Mahanagar*. Arati becomes much more fashion conscious when she moves out of the house to join the sales-girl work. The fashion of draping the saree changes in the work place. The *naveena* comes out of its shell finally which is represented in her confident walking style, dressing patterns, ways of communication. The social taboo of applying lipstick trickily comes into surface when Arati refuses the Anglo-Indian colleague to do so. Because, obviously, eroticizing female beauty and tradition were two unimaginable companions in Indian Bengali culture back then! However, after she got her first salary, again the independence was celebrated when Arati first hesitantly and then

confidently puts on lipstick for the first time on her lips. The wearing of sunglasses and confident gestures in restaurant while sitting with friend's husband were other new images that a "prachina" was not familiar with. Hence, even if Charulata and Mahanagar have time gaps in their social settings, these small nuances are their connecting links. Charulata, with her long hair and elaborate bangles, "bindi", earrings and properly clad saree is the perfect representation of a traditional married woman. Moreover there was also a difference in girlish and womanish style of wearing a saree. Though gifting a saree to a girl symbolically meant the girl has entered her womanhood, but the stark contrast in ways of wearing it drew a boundary between a matured responsible female motherly identity and a negligible juvenile identity. Thus, Durga of Pather Panchali and Bani of Mahanagar, the two female characters of same age, are old enough to wear a saree and perform household chores, but were not held as eligible competitors for the post of perfect Indian traditional woman!

Dwelling in this private space of women thus brings with it the very minute details of an everyday life of the women in that domain. Leisure and recreation are indispensable parts of the social and cultural life of humans (Mukherjee 2). Thus it constituted one of the most important points of discussion on that regard. What was leisure before consumerism hit the Bengali world becomes a central issue then. Pather Panchali is all about vibrancy and motion of life. Sarbajaya, bearing the weight of the family, don't really have any time to relax. When she does have, she spends it in knitting some torn blankets or combing her daughter's hair and some other petty staff. The leisure experienced by Apu, Durga and other kids of the village were also different. Sometimes Apu Durga together roamed about in the villages, or they had a look in the bioscope that stroll by the village roads. They had "choruibhatis" or small picnics in the village grounds. Before marriage thus, there was no such gendered space in the leisure times of boys and girls. However, the boys went to school which was a restrictive domain for the village girls. Moreover, over the course of the three films we also see forms of entertainment changing. In Pather Panchali, Apu and his family enjoy village holiday rituals. In Aparajito, Apu attends a play while at school. And in Apur Sansar, he and his wife go to the movies, watching a fairly ludicrous adaptation of an ancient myth (Neher 5). The conventional "gurumoshai" of indigenous traditional system of education in Bengal was beautifully described by Tulsi Lahiri who along with taking his classes also maintained a grocery shop. A nice compact family scene had been shown in the film, where Apu and Harihar were studying. Sarbajaya was making braids on Durga's hair and

Indir Thakuran was sitting and singing a song on her own. This commonality of space was rarely visible in any urban upper class family of the time. The children used to listen to stories told by their elderly beloved “pisi” (aunt) while the evening strolled by the world of Sarbajaya-Harihar! Hence, in the way a very urban director was gradually getting accustomed to the rural picture of Bengal, in the same way Ray made it his responsibility to unravel that mystery to his viewers too.

A stark urban-rural divide is noticeable in the childhood days of Apu and Pintu (the boy of Arati in Mahanagar). While Apu spent most of his times outside his home, went to see Jatras (Plays), his connection with his sister in his formative years was much more than with his mother, but it was diametrically opposite in case of Pintu. He was much upset with his mother’s decision to stay away from him for work. He had to be appeased with toys bought by his mother. It can be seen as a precursor to modern day problem of working parents; the commodification of parental affection! One of the commonest form of leisure back then among the kids was however very historically inclined, that is the trend of stamp and coin collection which is seen in Pintu.

In the urban cityscape, the upper class leisure was much elaborate. In the 1960s/70s Calcutta there was the rise in bars, clubs, coffee houses where male elites used to gather and “Bengalir adda” took a prominent socio-cultural shape having its origin in 20th century “bhadrolok mohol”. Moreover the living room of the Calcutta Babus of 20th century witnessed the rhythm of music, odour of wine and the cacophony of “Young Bengal”. The transformation of what ‘babu’ itself through-out the 19th and early 20th century is a peculiar journey of Bengali identity. In the beginning, the ‘babu’ was the spoilt, greedy, blindly-imitating son of a rich ‘baniyan’ or trader who emulated the Western aesthetics and lifestyle in order to fit in with the sophisticated folks of the colonial ruling class. Then the ‘babu’ was the self-critiquing radical with nationalist tendencies who was critical of the colonial governance. Then the ‘babu’ was transformed into an honorific for respectable occupations such as a doctor, a magistrate, or such. This transformation was largely recorded in the Bengali literature of this period, reflecting and influencing the social, cultural and political realities of the society through works such as ‘Nobo Babu Bilash’ by Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay, ‘Alaler Ghore Dulal’ by Peary Chand Mitra, and ‘Hutom Pechar Naksha’ by Kaliprasanna Singha, Thus, in Charulata we see Bhupen and his friends having a gala time in Bhupen’s living room celebrating the win of Liberals in England. Charulata however used to spend her time reading different books, strolling through the rooms, playing cards. Dressing of Betel leaves was very

fascinating for Bengali women back then and they had nicely designed tin boxes with chambers inside for storage purpose of leaves. Charulata gave special attention while preparing “paan” (betel leaves) for her brother-in-law, Amol.

Leisure however produced change. Gradually in the 19th century two parallel processes evolved. As mentioned earlier, parallel to the home and the world, a certain type of identity developed within the females generating from the same identity crisis that originated with nationalism! The boredom associated with loneliness helped them to spend more time with their own selves which sometimes triggered the desire to pen down the experiences in their lives. There was a rise of women’s writing in 19th century Bengal. In some cases, women were educated by their husbands; in other cases they did it secretly. Their writings could be memories (which were never accorded the status of ‘atmcharit’ by the male conventionalists, rather called ‘smriticharits’ which did not necessarily need an outstanding literary flair, hence feminine and passive literary style), or a narrative of the domestic spaces which were lived by them! Rassundari Devi’s *Amar Jibon* constitutes first such successful venture in the field. This was however mainly a product of upper class urban spouses of male elites. Hence in *Charulata*, the bewilderment in Charulata’s face was perfectly captured by Satyajit’s camera and it was after many unsuccessful efforts could Charulata come up with a memoir of her village which got published in the Bengali magazine! The reception of these autobiographies in the predominantly male reading circles were however patriarchal and sympathetic rather than acknowledging the women’s independent agencies. With time there was also a gradual move from non-fiction memoirs to fictional novels written by female writers among whom Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain.

All these traits that we discussed Satyajit Ray’s three movies can also be traced in other cinemas of the time which perhaps was intricately concerned with the social upheavals and conflicts suffocating the Bengali society back then while Mrinal Sen’s *Interview* and *Calcutta 71* glances at the turbulent 70s of Kolkata, while Rittwik Ghatak’s *Bari theke Paliye* ventures into seeing the contrast between reality and dreams relating to the city of Kolkata as seen from eyes of a kid of an affluent family based in rural Bengal.

The title cards of these films are symbolic. *Interview* begins with the some scenes from the documentary “Farewell to Crown” by Bimal Bhowmik which captured the removal of statues resembling the colonial status to get dumped in the Coronation Park in Delhi. But then this facade of decolonization completely crumbled when Ranjit Mullick

was denied a job in a corporate company merely for his traditional Bengali (rather Indian) attire of dhuti-punjabi. The film captures the sombre Bengali middle class household where the traditional patriarchal norms were not prevalent; where the divorced elder sister shoulders as much responsibility as her brother. The tram which Ranjit boarded was a microcosm of diverse Bengali middle class identities (predominantly male); from tie clad west influenced office goers to “chhaposha” (ordinary) Bengali male, from a respectable unmarried upper middle class woman (as sunglasses used to be a marker of status back in those days) to young girls, all inhabited that tram space. When the pickpocket was caught, the crowd overhauled the thief in the characteristic enthusiasm enjoyed by the mob whenever this type of events happens, as if it provided a semi-climactic break in the monotonous hustle and bustle of everyday life. A similar representation is made in the train sequence from the third story of *Calcutta 71* where daily passengers, baul singer, fakir and a gang of young kids assembled to provide a glance to the chaos in such everyday journeys. However, when the over enthusiast “bhodrolok” starts beating the kids for some minimal cause, the different shades of opinion for eradicating social nuisances emerged from several individuals present in the mob itself!

“Interview”, even if set in a lower middle class family, takes us to the interior of several of his friends’ sophisticated households which were the entry point to a perfect blend of traditional Bengali room décor with its elaborate mahogany beds and doors and the Western influences seen in curtain choices, lampshades and telephones. All these and many other essential unevenness culminate to the final stance of Ranjit Mullick when he breaks the show case that housed a suit-tie worn smart mannequin. This contrast of Bengali high culture with its lower subliminal version is seen in the last story from *Calcutta 71* which depicts the contradictory hypocrisy prevalent in upper caste upper class Bengali individuals all gathered in a sophisticated elite Kolkata party where people, completely distraught from the harsh realities (for they too constitute a reality which owns the means of production in a capitalist cosmopolitan society) contested on ideas for developing the nation to which they belonged. The disparate urban poor, the unfulfilled dreams of a young person, the Naxal revolutionary, family of a widowed elder sister, the gang of stealthy adolescents journeying unreserved in train, and the elite party participants all categorically mix and match to represent the exploitations and exploiters inhabiting the city and the countryside often coming across each other, encountering, humiliating, perishing in the eternal time lapse of a territory called Bengal, here more specifically Kolkata. The childhood in this film is troubled and lacks the otherwise

nostalgic efficacies that were visible in the movies discussed before. The wings are broken, the innocence is whipped by the realities of living in a metropolis where being Bengali doesn't fulfil the necessary requisite to earn living. Thus, this film and its varied character representation along with those from "Bari theke Paliye" present to us the plethora of those invisible identities which we don't really include when we coin the term "evolution of Bengali identity."

"Bari theke Paliye" documents the several fragmented realities of post-colonial Kolkata seen from a child's perspective who, tormented by his father's overtly disciplinarian attitude has stepped into this big city for freedom and prosperity! The iconic Howrah Bridge that has also made its appearance in the title card of Calcutta 71 was the first image with which his visit to the city was associated and depicted. As seen from a child's perspective, the otherwise mundane experiences of a city of that time looms largely and elaborately in front of us and the audience gets to look at the several sections of the city society that the child encounters with. However, in this film, the Bengaliana is substituted by the overarching presence of Kolkata by itself as a being, staying as "an aspirational marker of modernity" (Bose 8). The beggar and his clumsy presence, the singer who was also a runaway like the kid in his childhood days, the magician and his confident gestures, the "babu" savouring sumptuous meals in a Western style exists in their own rights occupying several socio-economic space scattered across the city. Thus the song of a Baul singer, another touchwood of Bengali society, accompanied by the contrasting scenes of dirty scattered Kolkata slums and shiny orderly Kolkata buildings substantiates the stark difference between what the child dreamt and what the reality in disguise actually was. When he accidentally gets into a party from an upper class city family, his status after judging from his simple cotton clothes, is measured by his English knowledge, a predominant marker of civilized being which cut across class caste age gender boundaries. His journeys continue and the question repeatedly comes to mind does the beggar, the mother in search for her lost son, the magician, can they be appropriated under umbrella of Bengali tradition. Recently baul songs, chhou dance and some other folk forms has been recognized by UNESCO as traditional art forms of Bengal and hence now political and cultural appropriation of them in the name of a national identity at first and then Bengali identity has begun. But unfortunately the people from the lower rungs do not actually have the affluence to relate to that.

Moving away from these movies if we focus on the two age old comedy films *Sare Chuattor* and *Basanta Bilap*, the culture within the boarding houses, the conglomeration of several identities coming from different parts of Bengal to serve their interest can be witnessed. Thus when a family with a young daughter inhabit temporarily in *Annapurna Boarding House*, the other male members of the place arose in opposition against their stay in the bachelors' hub. However as mentioned earlier, our focus is rather on the daily bickering and cheers of boarding houses emerging from the narration instead of its story. Thus, the daily routine of a Bengali boarding house comes into the forefront. The morning starts with tea being served, some practice classical singing while others prepare for office, some mocks the young lady inhabiting their place while others make silent gestures in protest, the evening worship is mandatory and then at night the bachelors gather to share their days' chit-chat. Surprising agency has been granted to the servant Madan in this family who even tries to persuade Uttam Kumar to adjust to present scenarios. Moreover, the position of the servant in the boarding house transcends that master-servant relationship that acquired a special character in colonial bungalows and enters into a cordial relationship which is widely seen in several of the Bengal comedy films of the time. If we look at the theme of love experienced in this movie we will get two scenarios. One is between the innocent elderly romantic relationship between the landlord and his wife and the other between the young adults of the boarding house-Uttam and Suchitra. Thus, through the gradual unfurling of romantic feelings between the two pairs of protagonists in both *Sare-Chuattor* and *Basanta Bilap*, we get a good glance of beginnings of love marriage replacing the highly traditional norm of kulin brahmanical arranged marriages so prevalent in colonial and pre-colonial Bengal.

As far as the interior designs of the boarding houses are concerned, they are more spacious and cordial than the more congested mess flats dominant in the latter half of the centuries. The one room spatial configuration doesn't permit the public-private domain differentiation which was fervent in the houses of the previous and contemporary times. Costume design changes significantly in the film *Basanta Bilap* which was made in 1974 as opposed to *Sare Chuattor* made in 1953. While the sarees constantly serve to be the dominant female attire for all these movies, the men are now clad in shirt and pant unlike the prominence of Dhuti Fatua across all age groups alike in *sare chuattor*. However, the independent social living of women being more vivid in *Basanta Bilap* than in *Sare Chuattor*, Aparna Sen or Anuradha doesn't hesitate to smoke a cigarette while taking a bid at Shyam or Soumitra in their last act of the revenge game that has been central in the

film. Thus, going beyond the theories regarding rising assertion of women identity, a stupendous bond of friendship and eventually love is seen to develop between the male and female members of these two neighbouring boarding houses. They are always at war with each other while gradually, in a secretive manner, the four boys fall for the four girls of *Basanta Bilap*. In parallel to this there is shown a beautiful “dada-boudi” relation between the boys and girls of that particular neighbourhood. Moreover, the elderly doctor’s chamber and the assemblage of other elderly people from the locality is representative of several favourite past time of the older generations. Thus, this cinema set on the time which is reeling on the problems taken up by Mrinal Sen, Rittwik Ghatak, Satyajit Ray, Nemaï Ghosh etc. portray the funnier cheerful aspect of a particular generation who were otherwise reeling under several social malice arising out of a recently independent India.

So, starting from *Pather Panchali* till *Basanta Bilap* several strands of both conforming and non-conforming Bengali identities have been discussed and analysed. But the predominantly high Babu culture of 19th century instead of being a matter of past emerges again exponentially in the Bengali tele novellas and soap operas of Bengali entertainment industry. Here, being Bengali means wearing traditional ‘aat-poure’ saree, heavy jewellery, practicing any and all rituals or festivities with pomp and glamour, and being involved in businesses. The character of 19th century babu and his wife are still retained to some extent, where it is ridiculed through exaggerations or faithfully adapted, depending from serial to serial. Marriage again regains a central character in all these serials, so much so that one serial was even named after a Brahmanical marriage ritual prevalent widely among upper class Hindus, which is the seven rounds to sanctify the marriage, the name of the serial being “*Sat Paake Badha*”. Female – Female relationship is antagonistic more often than not where women working in the same field could only exist as rivals to one another. Women inter-relationships in the household are replete with schemes and criminals conspiracies. Thus, in another long drawn serial “*Rashi*” a politically active mother in law is enraged with her son’s marriage into a lower class Bengali household, she instigates in all possible way to end her daughter-in-law’s life. So, the Bengali lifestyle is shown to be mainly consisting of marriage-life and joint family structure. Evident Stereotypes of rural lifestyle, accents and, ‘Ghoti’ and ‘Bangal’ subcultures are still used widely for generating laugh and ridicule amongst audiences. Modernity is either used as a plot device or painted in broad strokes where it is a marker of being shallow, greedy and an antithesis to ‘Bengali’ identity.

The elusive Bengaliana seems to be manufactured in recent memories by taking and discarding various facets of the babu culture of the 19th century. As these episodic serials are fodder for daily consumption of entertainment in every household, transcending geographical barriers, a really questionable set of aesthetics is being promoted in the mainstream media. This however is being countered recently by a collection of more realistic and contemporary depiction of the current generations' lifestyles and identities on digital platforms, theatres and films representing a spectrum of identities based upon region, aesthetics and localised cultures within the larger Bengal context and which is not limited by urban or rural spaces, with each inhabiting its own space while still interacting with another in a dynamic way.

Thus, throughout the several screen representations across the wide timelines starting from 1950s to 2010s, one basic point becomes clear that is the questionable tagging of monolithic linear hyperbolic Bengali identity. Thus, even if some theorists are of the opinion that modern day national cultures are formed by a uniform formation of high culture created by modern education and western capitalistic impersonal trainings, as separated from the diverse pre-modern agrarian societies, this paper argued about the colourful heterogeneity prevalent within modern day cultural formations, here the concern being primarily with Bengali identities. Thus, their family structures, relationship dimensions, moralities, lifestyle, across temporal and spatial configurations, be the rural household-boarding house duo from *Pather Panchali* and *Sare Chuattor* (both 1950s), or urban family spaces-hostel duo from *Mahanagar-Interview* and *Basanta Bilap* (all from 1970s), or the perspectives of the enormous discretely individual character range in *Bari theke Paliye*, *Kolkata 71*, or the traditional Bengali household from *Charulata* and Bengali serials separated by a wide time lapse, these representations present to us a wide spectrum across class, caste, gender and age boundaries of what we call Bengali identity, eventually breaking and rebuilding our ideas of a teleological process of evolution of identities which became eligible to be categorised under the term Bengali for their particular geographic association with a space called West Bengal.

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