

BENGALI REFUGEE LIFE AS SHOWN IN BENGALI CINEMA

Biswajit Khan

Assistant Professor, Department of History,
Berhampore College, Murshidabad,
E-mail: bkhan8640@gmail.com

Abstract:

The Partition of Bengal in 1947 resulted in one of the largest refugee crises in South Asian history, forcing millions of people to leave their ancestral homes and rebuild their lives in unfamiliar environments. The experiences of displacement, loss, survival, and identity crisis that emerged from this historical event have been extensively represented in Bengali cinema. This paper examines how Bengali films portray the lives of refugees affected by the Partition of Bengal and its long-term consequences. Employing a qualitative textual and visual analysis of selected films, including Chinnamul, Meghe Dhaka Tara, Komal Gandhar, Subarnarekha, Palanka, Chitra Nodir Pare, Seemantorekha, and Khancha, the study explores themes of displacement, memory, cultural identity, social marginalization, and survival. The analysis reveals that Bengali cinema functions as a significant cultural archive that preserves the collective memories and lived experiences of refugees. Through diverse cinematic strategies, filmmakers from both West Bengal and Bangladesh have documented the human suffering, resilience, and continuing impact of Partition across generations. The study argues that Bengali cinema not only reflects historical realities but also contributes to the preservation and interpretation of refugee experiences within Bengali cultural memory.

Keywords: Partition of Bengal, Refugees, Bengali Cinema, Communalism, Identity.

Introduction:

The Partition of British India in 1947 was one of the most significant and traumatic events in the history of South Asia. The division of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan resulted in widespread communal violence, mass migration, and the displacement of millions of people. Bengal, a region united by a common language, culture, and historical heritage, was also divided into East Bengal (East Pakistan, later Bangladesh) and West Bengal. This political decision profoundly altered the lives of Bengalis on both sides of the border. Countless Hindus migrated from East Bengal to West Bengal, while many Muslims moved from West Bengal to East Bengal. As a consequence, millions of people lost their homes, properties, social networks, and cultural roots, becoming refugees in an unfamiliar environment.

The refugee experience became one of the most enduring consequences of Partition in Bengal. Beyond the immediate challenges of migration, refugees face poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, identity crises, and psychological trauma. The memories of displacement and the longing for a lost homeland continued to shape Bengali society and culture for decades. These experiences found powerful expressions in literature, theatre, memoirs, and particularly in cinema. Bengali filmmakers from both India and Bangladesh have repeatedly returned to the themes of Partition and displacement, portraying the human suffering, resilience, and struggles of refugee communities.

Cinema occupies a unique position as both an artistic medium and a historical archive. Unlike conventional historical narratives, films capture emotional experiences, collective memories, and everyday realities that often remain absent from official records. Through visual imagery, dialogue, characterization, and symbolism, Bengali cinema has preserved important aspects of refugee life and contributed to the collective remembrance of Partition. Filmmakers such as Nimai Ghosh, Ritwik Ghatak, Rajen Tarafdar, Tanvir Mokammel, and Akram Khan have portrayed the refugee condition from diverse historical, social, and cultural perspectives.

Previous scholarships have extensively examined the political history of Partition, refugee rehabilitation, migration, and questions of identity in Bengal. Similarly, a few studies have focused on individual films dealing with Partition and displacement. However, relatively few

studies have undertaken a comparative examination of multiple Bengali films from both West Bengal and Bangladesh to explore how refugee experiences have been represented across different periods and cinematic traditions. This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing selected Bengali films that portray refugee life and its long-term consequences.

The central research question of this study is: How have Bengali films represented the experiences of displacement, memory, identity crisis, and survival among Bengali refugees in the aftermath of the Partition of Bengal? To answer this question, the study examines selected films including *Chinnamul*, *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Komal Gandhar*, *Subarnarekha*, *Palanka*, *Chitra Nodir Pare*, *Seemantorekha*, and *Khacha*. The objective is to investigate how these films depict refugee life, social marginalization, cultural memory, and the continuing impact of Partition on Bengali society.

This paper argues that Bengali cinema functions as a powerful cultural archive of Partition by portraying refugee life through recurring themes of displacement, loss, memory, identity formation, and social struggle. Through their narratives and visual representations, these films preserve the collective experiences of Bengali refugees and provide valuable insights into one of the most significant human tragedies in the history of Bengal.

Literature Review:

The Partition of Bengal in 1947 generated extensive scholarly discussion across the fields of history, sociology, migration studies, memory studies, and film studies. Researchers have examined the political causes of Partition, the refugee crisis, questions of identity, and the long-term social and cultural consequences of displacement. However, the representation of Bengali refugee experiences in cinema has received comparatively less comprehensive attention.

Among the major historians of Partition, Joya Chatterji (1994) analyzed the political developments that led to the division of Bengal and demonstrated how communal politics transformed the social and demographic landscape of the region. Her work highlights the complex relationship between nationalism, communal identity, and migration. Similarly, Gyanendra Pandey (2001) emphasized the human dimension of Partition by examining memory, violence, and trauma, arguing that official histories often fail to capture the experiences of ordinary people affected by displacement.

Ranabir Samaddar (1999) explored the refugee experience in South Asia and examined how migration, border formation, and citizenship shaped the lives of displaced communities. His work is particularly important for understanding the prolonged nature of refugee rehabilitation in West Bengal. Nilanjana Chatterjee (1992) investigated the rehabilitation process of East Bengali refugees and showed how displacement reshaped family structures, gender relations, and social identities in post-Partition Bengal.

From the perspective of cultural and memory studies, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) emphasized the importance of everyday experiences and memories in understanding historical events. His insights help explain why cinematic representations of Partition remain significant cultural archives of collective memory. Scholars have argued that cinema often preserves emotional and experiential dimensions of history that conventional historical narratives tend to overlook.

Film scholars have paid special attention to the works of Ritwik Ghatak, whose films are widely regarded as some of the most powerful artistic responses to the Partition of Bengal. Ashish Rajadhyaksha and other scholars have argued that films such as *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Komal Gandhar*, and *Subarnarekha* transform the refugee experience into a broader exploration of loss, memory, identity, and cultural fragmentation. Ghatak's cinematic language combines personal tragedy with national trauma, creating a unique representation of Partition in Bengali cinema.

Recent studies on Bengali cinema have also examined the works of filmmakers such as Tanvir Mokammel and Akram Khan, who revisit Partition through documentary and narrative forms. Their films explore the continuing impact of displacement and border formation on the lives of ordinary people in both Bangladesh and India. These cinematic texts demonstrate that the consequences of Partition extend beyond the immediate historical moment and continue to influence contemporary Bengali society.

Although existing scholarship has explored Partition history, refugee rehabilitation, and individual films dealing with displacement, relatively few studies have examined Bengali refugee life through a comparative analysis of multiple Bengali films produced across different periods and political contexts. This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing selected Bengali films from both West Bengal and Bangladesh and investigating how they represent

refugee experiences, identity formation, memory, suffering, and survival in the aftermath of Partition.

Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative research approach and employs textual and visual analysis of selected Bengali films that depict refugee experiences resulting from the Partition of Bengal in 1947 and its subsequent consequences. The research is based on the assumption that cinema functions not only as a form of artistic expression but also as an important cultural document that reflects social realities, historical memories, and collective experiences.

The study examines selected films, namely *Chinnamul* (1950) directed by Nimai Ghosh, *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Komal Gandhar* (1961), and *Subarnarekha* (1965) directed by Ritwik Ghatak, *Palanka* (1975) directed by Rajen Tarafdar, *Chitra Nodir Pare* (1999) and *Seemantorekha* (2017) directed by Tanvir Mokammel, and *Khacha* (2017) directed by Akram Khan.

The films were selected according to three criteria. First, they directly engage with the experiences of displacement and refugee life caused by the Partition of Bengal. Second, they possess significant historical and cultural importance within Bengali cinema. Third, they present diverse representations of refugee identity, memory, rehabilitation, social marginalization, and survival struggles across different historical periods.

The analysis focuses on narrative structure, characterization, dialogue, symbolism, visual imagery, and representations of space and displacement. Attention is paid to themes such as loss of homeland, refugee identity, communal violence, economic hardship, cultural memory, and the search for belonging. In addition to film analysis, secondary sources including books, journal articles, historical studies, newspaper articles, and archival materials have been consulted to provide historical context and support interpretation.

Through this qualitative examination of cinematic texts and historical sources, the study seeks to understand how Bengali cinema has represented refugee life and how these representations contribute to broader discussions on memory, identity, and the legacy of Partition in Bengal.

Analysis and Discussion:

Chinnamul (1950):

With the horrible and traumatic memories of the 1947 Partition of India and the division of Bengal, the cinema ‘Chinnamul’ was made in 1950. It is considered the first Bengali film centred on the life crisis of uprooted refugees created by the Partition of Bengal. Director Nimai Ghosh poignantly portrays the heartbreaking story of a group of refugee men and women who, in order to save their lives and honour, took shelter in Kolkata after fleeing communal violence in Naldanga of East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh). The film depicts their immense suffering, struggle for survival, and the social and economic challenges they faced. The main characters—Srikanta, Batasi, Prosanna, Kailash, Haran, Sidhu, Nistarini, Mangala, Bishu Thakur and others—represent the tensions of refugee life and the struggle for food, shelter, and livelihood. In the unfamiliar environment of Kolkata, the director poignantly portrays their desperate efforts to find identity and a patch of ground to lay their heads. In one memorable scene of the film, a heart-wrenching image shows an elderly woman clinging to the pillar of her house in Nalldanga village, weeping futilely. She refuses to leave the land of her seven generations—her memories, struggles, rivers, fields, familiar paths walked since childhood, the graves of relatives, and the cremation grounds. Her repeated plea is, “You go, I won’t”. Yet, despite her desperate plea, Batasi, Prosanna, Kailash, Haran, Sidhu and others must leave everything behind and move towards an uncertain future on this side of the border (Kolkata). The poignant story of their subhuman struggle for life in Kolkata’s refugee camps stirred a storm of anguish in the hearts of audiences. It can therefore be said that “Chinnamul stands as a living document of the immeasurable sorrow of displaced people who, after leaving their ancestral homes forever, spent their days in miserable conditions at Sealdah railway station, wandering streets in hunger.”

Chinnamul presents the refugee experience in its most immediate and material form. Unlike later Partition films that focus on memory and psychological trauma, Nimai Ghosh concentrates on the harsh realities of displacement itself. The film portrays refugees not as passive victims but as ordinary people struggling to rebuild their lives amidst poverty, homelessness, and social marginalization. The old woman’s refusal to leave her ancestral home symbolizes the emotional bond between people and place, while the journey to Kolkata represents the painful rupture of identity caused by Partition. Through its realist style and use of actual refugee locations, Chinnamul transforms the refugee crisis into a powerful social

document. The film demonstrates that Partition was not merely a political event but a human catastrophe that uprooted thousands of lives and destroyed long-established social worlds.

Meghe Dhaka Tara (1960):

Ritwik Kumar Ghatak in his film *Meghe Dhaka Tara* presents a creative narrative of refugee life in post-1947 Kolkata. In a sense, the film stands as a document and record of the Partition of India and Bengal, and of the struggles of displaced people. This creation, an elixir of time's chronicle and creativity, stands timeless. After the Partition of India and Bengal in 1947, the cinema revolves around the struggle for survival of a Bengali refugee family that takes shelter in Kolkata after migrating from East Bengal. The central character of the cinema is Neeta, an educated girl from a middle-class family. An M.A. student at university, Neeta tutors all day and returns home in the evening, handing over her last few rupees of salary to her mother's lap at month's end. She bears the expenses of her younger siblings' education, constantly encourages her elder brother Shankar to nurture his hidden musical talent, and occasionally buys him shaving items or even cloth for a Punjabi. In short, while pulling the burden of the household, Neeta seems to have forgotten how to dream. Yet she continues to live with the hope that one day the family's situation will change, that everyone will become self-reliant and smiles will return to their faces. Sustained by this distant dream, Neeta carries on her struggle for life. Her patience and resilience deeply touch the audience, but even more heartbreaking is her gradual isolation after she contracts tuberculosis in the final stage of the story. In the film's closing moments, when she finally sees her beloved brother, Neeta cries out in desperation, "I want to live, I want to live, Dada!" That cry keeps echoing against the walls of time and continues to move us even today. Ghatak's film, filled with many unspoken layers of time and relationships, spreads throughout its narrative the emotions, realizations, pain, suffering, and resistance experienced at personal, social, and national levels due to Partition. Even today, it remains deeply relevant for understanding the human and cultural catastrophe of Partition.

In *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, Ritwik Ghatak shifts the focus from physical displacement to the psychological consequences of refugee existence. Neeta embodies the sacrifices made by countless refugee women who became the economic backbone of their families after Partition. Her gradual emotional and physical destruction reflects the larger collapse of refugee aspirations in post-Partition Bengal. The film suggests that displacement continues to affect

individuals long after migration has ended, creating feelings of alienation, insecurity, and unfulfilled desires. Neeta's desperate cry, "I want to live," transcends her personal tragedy and becomes the collective voice of an entire displaced generation struggling for dignity and survival. Thus, the film reveals the hidden emotional costs of Partition that often remain absent from conventional historical narratives.

Komal Gandhar (1962):

On 31 March 1962, Ritwik Ghatak's film 'Komal Gandhar', centered on the story of Partition of India and the struggles of refugees, was released. In this film, he repeatedly uses traditional Bengali folk wedding songs to hint at the reunion of the two Bengals that were torn apart. Through various dialogues and scenes, the longing for reunion becomes evident. In 'Komal Gandhar', the pain of Bengal's Partition is expressed through the dialogues, songs, and metaphors used by Bhrigu's theatre group. At the very beginning of the film, we hear an old man, played by Bhrigu, say: "Why should I go? Explain to me. Why should I leave such a tender land, leave my river Padma? Why should I go?" We also see the joint production of the play 'Shakuntala' by two theatre groups. In the scene where Shakuntala leaves her father's home to go to her husband's house, the film poignantly mirrors the heartbreaking experience of refugees who were forced to leave their homeland in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) during the Partition. Later, when the theatre group spends leisure time on the banks of the Padma River, everyone else is cheerful, but Bhrigu and Anasuya gaze toward East Bengal with deep affection and sorrow. The railway line stretching toward East Bengal appears like a minus sign—though once it had been a plus sign that connected the two Bengals. In expressing this pain of separation and the yearning for reunion, Ritwik thus moves his camera swiftly along the railway tracks toward East Bengal, only for it to descend into the stillness of darkness upon hitting an obstacle.

While Chinnamul and Meghe Dhaka Tara focus on refugee suffering, Komal Gandhar explores the cultural fragmentation caused by Partition. Ghatak presents the division of Bengal as a rupture not only of territory but also of a shared cultural identity. Through theatre, music, and recurring references to East Bengal, the film expresses a deep longing for reunion and cultural continuity. The railway line serves as a powerful symbol of a connection that once united the two Bengals but has now become a marker of separation. By portraying the emotional

attachment of displaced people to their lost homeland, the film argues that political borders cannot erase collective memories and cultural bonds. In this sense, *Komal Gandhar* transforms the refugee experience into a broader reflection on identity, belonging, and cultural loss.

Subarnarekha (1965)

Released in 1965, *Subarnarekha*, the third film by Ritwik Ghatak on the pain of Partition, portrays the reflection of social reality. In this film, the director shows how helpless men and women, turned into pawns in the game of politics, were forced to leave behind their ancestral homes, hereditary occupations, and their familiar homeland to migrate to West Bengal. What follows is a relentless struggle for survival and the desperate attempt to rebuild life—sometimes collectively, sometimes in lonely isolation, sometimes within family unity, and sometimes amid its inevitable breakdowns. Ishwar, a leader of the refugee rights movement, leaves the refugee life in the hope of a better future and takes up a job with his sister Sita and the motherless boy Abhiram. This leads to a conflict of ideals between him and his comrade Haraprasad. While Ishwar becomes busy building a prosperous life for himself, Haraprasad remains devoted to improving the living conditions of the refugees in Nabajiban Colony. Both Ishwar and Haraprasad ultimately fail in their different dreams. Later, Sita and Abhiram leave Ishwar and move to Kolkata to build their own family. Haraprasad's wife commits suicide under the crushing weight of poverty. Many years later, when a disillusioned Ishwar prepares to end his life, he meets his former comrade Haraprasad again. Haraprasad tells him: "Oh, you fugitive coward, you accepted! Why are you in this condition now? You too seem to want to drift in emptiness. Do you know what I feel, brother? Whether you protest or tuck your tail and run away, nothing changes. Everything is lost! We are all rootless, like spirits in the air." Towards the end of the film, we see the devastating tragedy that descends upon the lives of Sita and Abhiram. Yet at the beginning of the film, they were shown as carefree children, laughing, playing, and running about. With great skill, Ghatak's screenplay reveals that the catastrophe in the lives of these innocent children is ultimately the result of the Partition.

Subarnarekha offers perhaps the most devastating critique of the long-term consequences of Partition. The film demonstrates how displacement continues to shape lives across generations, producing social exclusion, economic hardship, and personal tragedy. Through the experiences of Ishwar, Sita, and Abhiram, Ghatak reveals the failure of both personal ambition and

collective political struggle to overcome the trauma of uprootedness. The destruction of family relationships and the tragic fate of the characters suggest that Partition created wounds that could not easily be healed through rehabilitation or resettlement. By linking individual suffering to historical forces, the film exposes the profound human cost of political decisions. Therefore, *Subarnarekha* stands as a powerful commentary on the enduring legacy of displacement and rootlessness in Bengali society.

Palanka (1975)

The film *Palanka*, directed by Rajen Tarafdar and based on the story “Palank” by Narendra Nath Mitra, beautifully portrays the post-Partition reality of 1947. Released in 1975, the film is set in the aftermath of the division, when Hindus from newly created East Pakistan migrated toward India in search of security and survival. In the story, Rajmohan, a Hindu aristocrat from a village, refuses to leave his ancestral home out of deep attachment to the land, while the rest of his family moves to Kolkata. His only companions remain his vast garden house and a few employees. Among them, the poor Muslim Makbul becomes central to the narrative when he buys the expensive bed (palank) belonging to Rajmohan’s daughter-in-law. The film's story revolves around this incident. Meanwhile, Rajmohan’s refugee family in Kolkata falls into severe financial hardship. When his daughter-in-law writes to him asking him to sell a bed and send money, Rajmohan helplessly sells his beloved, intricately carved bed to Makbul. Around this single bed, the film unfolds a powerful narrative reflecting the political climate of the time, the seeds of communal consciousness, and the enduring nature of feudal attitudes—expressed through brief yet profound dialogues. Some memorable lines from the film include:

“For the poor, there is neither Hindustan nor Pakistan—only the graveyard.”

“No man left among men, no honor, and no sense.”

“Some fry in oil, others burn in fire.”

Through such striking dialogues, the film leaves a deep philosophical imprint throughout its narrative.

In *Palanka*, Rajen Tarafdar examines Partition through the lens of memory, attachment, and social transformation. The palank itself functions as a symbolic object that carries memories of

the past and reflects changing social relationships in a divided Bengal. Rajmohan's refusal to abandon his ancestral home highlights the emotional struggle between migration and belonging, while Makbul's acquisition of the bed reveals the changing social realities created by Partition. The film suggests that ordinary people, regardless of religion, became victims of larger political forces beyond their control. Through its subtle narrative and symbolic imagery, *Palanka* demonstrates how memories of homeland continue to shape individual identities even after physical separation. The film therefore emphasizes the human and cultural dimensions of displacement rather than its political aspects alone.

Chitra Nodir Pare (1999)

The renowned and popular filmmaker from Bangladesh, Tanvir Mokammel, powerfully portrays in his 1999 film 'Chitra Nodir Pare' why people were forced to leave their beloved homeland, become refugees, and fall victim to communal riots in the backdrop of the 1947 Partition. The story begins on a winter afternoon in 1947 on the banks of the Chitra River in Narail, where several children—Najma, Salma, Badal, Minati, and Bidyut—are playing together. These boys and girls of different ages belong to both Hindu and Muslim communities and live in neighboring houses. Minati and Bidyut's father, the middle-aged widower Shashikanta Sengupta, is a lawyer. He lives happily with his children and his widowed sister Anuprabha in their dream home, "Panthanir," beside the river. During the Pakistan period, when communal tensions rise and many members of minority communities begin leaving the country, many people set their sights on Shashikanta's house. Hindus from East Pakistan start migrating to West Bengal. Under these circumstances, Shashikanta also comes under pressure to leave the country, but he remains firm in his decision not to abandon his ancestral home. However, his younger son Bidyut, after being harassed by Muslim friends, insists on going to Kolkata. Eventually, Shashikanta sends him there for his education. Some time passes after that. By 1964, Shashikanta's daughter Minati has grown up and falls in love with her childhood friend Badal. Badal enrolls at University of Dhaka and becomes involved in the anti-martial law movement. One day, he is shot dead by police during a protest march. Meanwhile, communal riots between Hindus and Muslims erupt all around. Shashikanta's widowed niece Basanti becomes a victim of the violence—after being assaulted, she drowns herself in the waters of the Chitra River. This tragedy breaks Shashikanta mentally and physically.

Eventually, he breathes his last on the banks of the Chitra River. In a cruel twist of fate, Minati and Anuprabha finally leave their homeland and migrate to Kolkata.

Tanvir Mokammel's *Chitra Nodir Pare* examines the gradual process through which communal tensions transformed peaceful coexistence into displacement and exile. Unlike films that focus on the immediate aftermath of Partition, this film traces how minority communities in East Pakistan experienced increasing insecurity over time. The Chitra River serves as a metaphor for continuity, memory, and the passage of history, while the fate of Shashikanta's family illustrates the vulnerability of minorities in a changing political environment. The film highlights that migration was often not a voluntary choice but the result of fear, violence, and social exclusion. Through its sensitive portrayal of loss and nostalgia, *Chitra Nodir Pare* underscores the emotional trauma associated with leaving one's homeland and abandoning generations of cultural heritage.

Seemantorekha (2017):

To mark seventy years of the Partition (1947–2017), renowned filmmaker Tanvir Mokammel created the full-length documentary 'Seemantorekha' ("The Borderline"). The documentary mainly portrays the impact of Partition on the lives of Hindu families who migrated from East Bengal to India, Muslim families who moved from India to Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), and people who lived in various refugee camps. The film progresses primarily through interviews with these displaced people, revisiting a chapter of history through their personal stories. Through this research-based documentary, Tanvir Mokammel attempts to rediscover the true nature of the tragic pain experienced by Bengali-speaking people—ordinary lives sacrificed to the political interests of leaders of that time. The journey begins with two elderly women, Aparajita Ghoshal and Anjali Chakraborty, whose childhoods were spent in this land, but who were forced to migrate to India during Partition. After 70 years, when they return to their homeland, they find that other people now live where they once did and nothing of their old homes remain. Still, searching through childhood memories, they say, "Our house stood here. Where are the wood-apple tree and the mango tree?" This longing remembrance of lost time deeply moves the audience from the very beginning. The profound sorrow they carry gradually spreads to the viewers. In exploring whether the Partition of Bengal was inevitable or could have been prevented, Tanvir Mokammel takes us back through the pages of history,

showing how a single political decision devastated millions of lives. Those who once had homes, orchards, ponds, and comfortable lives in East Bengal were forced to become refugees in India. Many ended up living beside railway tracks, in refugee colonies, or in camps, struggling with poverty and hardship to the point of losing their sense of human identity. The filmmaker also takes us to refugee camps in West Bengal—such as Cooper’s Camp in Ranaghat, Dhubulia Camp, Bhadrokali Camp, and the refugee colonies of Jadavpur—where elderly survivors still cannot forget the pain of Partition. As Tanvir Mokammel himself says, Partition is a pain for which language has yet to be created. The cries of uprooted people echo throughout ‘Seemantorekha’.

As a documentary, Seemantorekha provides direct testimony to the lived experiences of Partition survivors. By foregrounding personal memories rather than official histories, Tanvir Mokammel demonstrates how the trauma of displacement continues to shape individual and collective identities decades after 1947. The documentary reveals that refugee life involved not only material deprivation but also the loss of emotional and cultural belonging. The return of elderly migrants to their childhood homes illustrates the persistence of memory and the impossibility of fully recovering what was lost. Through these testimonies, the film reinforces the idea that Partition remains an unfinished historical experience whose consequences continue to resonate in contemporary Bengali society.

Khancha (2017):

Based on the short story “Khancha” by the fiction writer Hasan Azizul Haque, the renowned Bangladeshi filmmaker Akram Khan made the film Khancha, which was released on 22 September 2017. Set against the backdrop of the 1947 Partition, the film tells the story of a house exchange between two Hindu–Muslim families from East Bengal and West Bengal. The main characters, Ambujaksha and his wife Sarojini, dream of leaving their homeland in East Bengal and settling peacefully in West Bengal. However, their hopes are repeatedly delayed by various conflicts and problems. Amid communal riots and the persecution of minorities, their homeland gradually turns into a “cage” for Ambujaksha and Sarojini.

Khancha explores the psychological condition of people trapped between homeland and migration. The metaphor of the “cage” reflects the growing sense of confinement experienced by minorities who found themselves increasingly alienated in their own land after Partition.

Ambujaksha and Sarojini's repeated failure to leave symbolize the uncertainty and instability that characterized refugee existence. The film highlights how political boundaries transformed familiar spaces into sites of fear and exclusion. By focusing on the emotional dilemmas surrounding migration, Khancha demonstrates that displacement often begins long before physical movement occurs. The film therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological and social pressures that compelled many Bengalis to abandon their ancestral homes.

Conclusion:

The analysis of these selected Bengali films demonstrates that cinema has played a crucial role in preserving and interpreting the experiences of refugees created by the Partition of Bengal. Although each film approaches the subject from a different historical and artistic perspective, all of them reveal the profound impact of displacement on individual lives, families, and communities. From the immediate struggle for survival depicted in *Chinnamul* to the psychological trauma explored in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, the cultural fragmentation portrayed in *Komal Gandhar*, the enduring rootlessness represented in *Subarnarekha*, and the themes of memory and belonging highlighted in *Palanka*, *Chitra Nodir Pare*, *Seemantorekha*, and *Khancha*, a common narrative emerges: Partition was not a single historical event but an ongoing human experience.

These films collectively show that refugee life was marked not only by economic hardship and social marginalization but also by the loss of homeland, identity, cultural continuity, and emotional security. By representing the voices, memories, and struggles of displaced people, Bengali cinema has preserved dimensions of Partition history that are often absent from official records. The films function as cultural archives through which the pain, resilience, aspirations, and memories of refugees continue to be remembered and reinterpreted.

Therefore, Bengali cinema serves as both an artistic expression and a historical testimony, enabling contemporary audiences to engage with one of the most significant human tragedies in the history of Bengal. The continued relevance of these films demonstrates that the legacy of Partition remains deeply embedded in Bengali collective memory and cultural consciousness.

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