HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE KALEIDOSCOPE / CHAALCHITRA (1981)

Mrinal Sen

Bengali language

Film link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5zan3y4x5Uk

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OVERVIEW

Director Mrinal Sen made his first feature film in 1953 but was slow to gain success as his first few films didn't fare well at the box office. Eventually, he tasted both success and controversy with *Baishey Sravan* (*Wedding Day*, 1960) and *Aakash Kusum* (*Up in the Clouds*, 1965). Soon after, *Mr. Bhuvan Shome* (1969), a landmark film, radically altered new cinema and art-house cinema in India. Other films such as *Mrigayaa* (*The Royal Hunt,* 1976) and *Aakaler Sandhane* (*In Search of Famine*, 1980) still retain their impact. Sen won awards at all the major international film festivals, including Cannes, Venice and Berlin. His films usually have a signature shock treatment style that is both cerebral and hard-hitting, coupled with technical jugglery and gimmicks. He was both loved and hated for his uncompromising political stance and critique of the contemporary communist government in West Bengal. Along with Satyajit Ray and Ritwick Ghatak, Sen is considered one of the trio of great Indian filmmakers both domestically and internationally.

Film Since his previous film, *And Quiet Rolls the Dawn*, Sen had been enamoured with the idea of showing a day from beginning to end in a series of non-events. The experiment, which Australian writer John Hood calls "the magnification of the mundane", was further extended in *The Kaleidoscope.* The film was inspired by Sen's personal experience when one day he had to cancel an important

meeting because someone from his grade school, whom he didn't even recognize, showed up at his doorstep with his entire family. Sen, swallowing his annoyance, behaved like a good host, but when they left, he couldn't but exclaim, "Bloody fool, he spoilt my whole evening!" But he immediately realized that the man would be likely telling his grandchildren an entirely different story— that how, Sen, despite being a celebrity, remained unchanged and still cared for his old friend. Sen started working on the story right away and even promoted it at the Berlin Film Festival, where he went to receive the Silver Bear in 1981 (for *And Quiet Rolls the Dawn*). In his usual hectic, frenzied manner, he completed the film in time for the Venice Film Festival.

Reception However, the film, suffering from many weaknesses (hard to identify with protagonist or other characters; lack of tension or "rising action"; Sen's discomfiture with his no-longer-lower-middle-class status, etc.) did not have a good commercial run. Nor did it do very well at the Venice Film Festival, though it was nominated as the Official Selection; only Anjan Dutta, the young, sharp protagonist, won the Alitalia Award for Best Actor (1981).

SYNOPSIS

One night, Dipu, a lower-middle-class young man, finds himself with an elite and elegant stranger, who offers him a place to stay. But as soon as they arrive at the man's ramshackle, dilapidated room, the stranger begins to undress casually and Dipu realizes, "the smart, urban, elite man got almost naked and turned poor." Later, Dipu relates this story to a newspaper editor, who offers him the opportunity to write an article on his "clan" (the lower-middle class) in 48 hours. The only criterion is that the story should sell and readers should swallow it easily. Dipu returns home, ever on the lookout for stories for his article. At home (at a tenement house), his mother (Maa) falls on the slippery courtyard and he then gets into a fierce competition with other women from the building about who can clean the courtyard best. Dipu and Maa then argue over bothering the wealthy neighbour with smoke from his coal oven. Maa asks him to buy her a gas oven, if he can afford it. That night, Dipu and his younger brother see one of their old women neighbours steal their coal. Maa however refuses to confront the old woman and instead moves the coal to their upstairs room the next day. Dipu is annoyed that Maa is not cooperating by giving him materials to write his story. Dipu tries to help a neighbour get his pregnant wife to the hospital but arrives too late with a cab. So, he decides to ride around the city and meets a random palmist, who is busy fleecing two foreign hippies. Dipu tells him that he will write a story about him. He brings Dipu to his room in a slum. However, after listening to his story, Dipu rescinds his offer as he cannot picture the palmist as anything but fraudulent. He finally hones in on the idea of writing on coal ovens, but his story is too "heavy". In a last desperate attempt to get a story, he tries to start a fight between the tenement house and their rich neighbours over coal smoke, but fails. That night, he has a bizarre dream of thwarted revolution led by women with coal ovens and brooms. The next day, he meets the editor without a finished article, only a vague idea of writing on the importance of coal ovens for the middle class. The editor's take is much more consumerist and he implies that if he wants the job, Dipu can only write on the angles he suggests— such as pollution— which are easy to "sell". Dipu compromises and later gets the job, then promptly gifts Maa her much-desired gas oven.

CHARACTERS

Dipu	A young man looking for a better job as a writer (played by Anjan Dutta)
Maa	Dipu's mother, unnamed (played by Gita Sen)
Apu	Dipu's younger brother (played by Kaushik Sen)
The editor	Chief editor of a leading newspaper, unnamed (played by Utpal Dutt)
Shivaprasad	A roadside palmist

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Dipu

Dipu is the protagonist of the film. He is an enthusiastic and mischievous young man, as yet unburdened by the daily grind of middle-class life He is optimistic that he will get a job that he loves, which is writing.

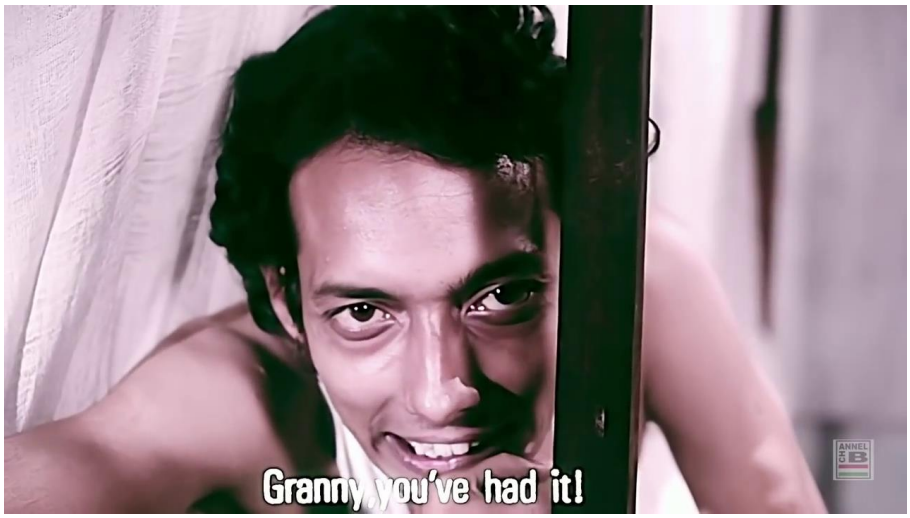
Enthusiastic Dipu is erratically enthusiastic for the most part, displaying a nervous energy as if he's being driven by something, which in this case is the search for a story to submit to the newspaper editor. He chases several leads haphazardly: for instance, trying to get photographic

evidence of the courtyard-scrubbing competition between the neighbour women or opening the window and getting Maa to help with making smoke to annoy the wealthy neighbour, but his timing just fails.

Mischievous His enthusiasm and optimism go hand-in-hand with his mischievousness; and in this, he finds a fitting partner in his younger brother. For instance, he silently observes the old woman stealing coal but only later reports it to Maa; also, he watches the women comically competing to scrub the courtyard; and he follows the old palmist to sniff out a story but finds it far too maudlin and fraudulent for his tastes. Later, desperate for a story, he even breaks open the nailed-down kitchen window and stuffs the oven full of coal, so that the smoke goes towards the house next door. Maa is annoyed but curious and ends up helping him make more smoke, then watches for the reaction. But the man next door only closes the windows.

Liberal Dipu appears to be a liberal-minded young man, especially when it comes to some gender issues— once he takes notice, that is. He becomes quite concerned about the coal oven smoke that he is convinced burns his mother's eyes. As soon as he's able, he replaces the coal oven with a gas stove which doesn't produce any fumes. His dream sequence also highlights his perception of women suffering, then leading a revolution and finally laughing in the face of governmental oppression as the smoke has made them immune to tear gas.

Helpful Dipu does not hesitate to both receive and offer help. In the opening sequence, he is quickly convinced by the stranger to follow him to his home. And when his neighbour Romen needs a cab to take his pregnant wife to the hospital, he spends quite some time searching the busy intersections for a cab, only to be disappointed repeatedly.



Maa

Dipu's mother, again an unnamed character, is in many ways a typical middle-aged, lower-middle-class Bengali woman of the time— a long-suffering, good mother to her two sons and a good wife to her husband. But she is also fiercely competitive and always seeking upward mobility, that is, a better lifestyle for herself and her family, even though she simultaneously tends to avoid conflict and believes in keeping up appearances.

Responsible This characteristic is easily inferred even though we aren't shown her household tasks in too much detail— she cooks, does laundry and cleans their rooms, sends her husband to the market with shopping lists, buys household items and so on. No one in her family looks as if they are not well-cared for, so even if she sometimes complains, she does these tasks well.

Helpful She is also a good neighbour and someone whom everyone can turn to for advice. When Romen's wife goes into labour, she tells him to take her to the hospital immediately and when he can't find a cab, she advises him to take a rickshaw. She also tells the other women to compromise when the girl from the wealthy house next door complains about smoke from ovens.

Competitive Maa is uncharacteristically, for someone in her class, fiercely competitive even over small matters, though we see only positive end results. After she falls on the slippery courtyard and says some choice words to a neighbour lady, Kalpana, the latter starts scrubbing the courtyard just to show everyone that she is also a responsible resident. But Maa takes this opportunity to turn it into a cleaning competition, where all the other women, feeling guilty themselves, begin to vigorously scrub the courtyard. The end result is a safe and sanitary place, though it costs Dipu a story idea.

Keeping up appearances The flip side of her competitiveness is a deep reluctance to engage in open conflict with others— her grumblings are always passive-aggressive and under her breath. For instance, when she finds that the old woman had indeed stolen quite a good bucketful of her coal (as her sons reported to her), she doesn't create a commotion but almost ceremoniously carries the heavy coal bin up the stairs to their third-floor room with Apu's help. When Apu gives the old woman the eye, she even reprimands him because that is unseemly behaviour.

Consumerist Maa is happily unburdened with any sort of "communist" ideology like Dipu. She always wants to get the best for cheapest while one-upping the neighbours, for instance, when she drives a hard bargain to buy five shiny new steel utensils from the itinerant sellers, selling Dipu's favourite (but torn) brown trousers in the process. Her rationale is less that they need new dishes and more that "no one uses the Bell-metal old style dishes nowadays"— the new dishes are definitely something to show off to the neighbours.



THE EDITOR

The editor appears at the beginning and end of the film; he is a peripheral, yet impactful character. He interviews Dipu on his son's recommendation and tolerates Dipu's ramblings and critiques equanimously. His only criteria for publication are that the article must be easy to "digest" and "sell well"— touching on all the current hot topics, without regard to the human factor, if need be. He also appears as a quintessential, exploitative capitalist in Dipu's dream sequence.

Tolerant Due to his line of work, the editor likely needs to interact successfully with all kinds of people— his employees and others. He bears with Dipu's sometimes rambling and sometimes impassioned talking points, even setting aside Dipu's critique of his son Rahul's poetry— proving himself to be more professional than a mere doting father. Later, he appears to be a reasonably understanding boss running a newspaper office smoothly. He even gives Dipu a chance to prove himself after Dipu imagines his character unfavourably in the dream and also fails his assignment— though of course that chance comes with some compromises.

Consumerist The editor's foremost concern is that the stories published must be "easy to swallow" and "sell well"— a touch of greed can definitely be discerned in his manner. However, sometimes, the sarcastic way in which he says these things seems to suggest that he well understands the inherent hypocrisy and sham of this business model. But like everyone else in this consumerist society, he, too, is bound by unspoken rules of publishing only what the public would most likely consume: current hot topics like pollution, without regard to the human factor that the average middle-class family could only afford coal ovens. This dichotomy and complexity of character is likely the reason why he chooses to employ Dipu even after identifying him as a "communist". In the context, though communist ideologies were the norm, as a successful businessman running a largely capitalist

venture, he couldn't wholeheartedly subscribe to its opposite.

Exploitative/Tattler Dipu, however subconsciously, only identifies the editor's capitalist/ exploitative side in his dream sequence. The editor is first seen in a pristine, unblemished white room with many fans, then standing in front of a bungalow— the imagery suggesting kinship with the British masters of tea or indigo plantations. His opponents are the lower-middle-class women with smoking coal ovens and brooms, as well as the motley group of characters Dipu meets. The smoke and cacophony threaten the editor, who then calls on the police to disperse the crowd— much like a real-life scenario. He is afraid and threatened, but finally, the coercive arm of the government does its job and he and his position remain secure.



THEMES

Search for a story Dipu is, quite literally, an author in search of a story and that is a central theme of the film. However, what we are shown is essentially a series of non-events that fail to build up into any coherent narrative— just as real-life actually is— and Dipu simultaneously also fails to tie up these random events and characters he witnesses into any coherent whole for his newspaper story. Dipu is yet to understand fully that storytelling is an art in which he is far from being proficient— unlike the editor. For instance, the film begins with a very interesting little scenario with an insightful and catchy conclusion— "Thus the smart, urban, elite man got almost naked and turned poor." This could well have been tied together with some other events in the film that Dipu experiences, notably with the fraudulent palmist Shivaprasad. But Dipu utterly fails to make any connection between his own experiences, let alone reflect on common themes and so on. So, he finally settles on a most mundane and boring topic— coal ovens— a staple in every middle-class kitchen and something the average public would have really no interest in reading about, unless spiced up with some saleable angle like pollution or women's suffering.

Unfortunately, the film itself also suffers from this same lack of narrative and thematic coherence, which is perhaps a reason why *The Kaleidoscope* is considered one of Sen's lesser films. First, there are many unexplored, random scenes and images peppered though the film that act as distraction rather than unifying motif— for instance, Jesus's sermon on a hoarding at a central location or pictures of Satya Sain Baba (an Indian guru and philanthropist) adorning the walls of the wealthy neighbour next door or even the angry handwritten graffiti on a random wall. Further, Dipu is an erratic enough character that the viewer has a hard time identifying with him and the challenges he faces, which don't develop/ progress or create any kind of tension. For instance, the long sequence where Dipu is frantically searching for a cab ends anticlimactically and doesn't lead to anything in particular. There are too many other characters and they are shown with too little detail for their stories to create any lasting impression on the viewer: for instance, Kalpana's or Romen's household or even Shivaprasad's life could have become interesting subplots but remain undeveloped. These largely unlinked non-events are also too familiar for the target audience to create much impact by defamiliarising the known.



Class Sen again depicts the travails of the lower-middle class here, as with *And Quiet Rolls the Dawn* (1979). Dipu's own family doesn't appear to be affluent, with Maa having to cook on a noxious coal oven, mend everyone's clothes regularly, make detailed shopping lists and budgets accounting for every penny. The setting is a similar tenement house with many neighbours, all of whom share the same communal courtyard and water reservoir for their daily needs, such as washing clothes and dishes. The women in particular are also typically nosy, quarrelsome, generally dissatisfied with their lot and never let an opportunity for a sharp verbal jibe go wasted. For instance, Kalpana considers herself to be of a different status since she teaches at school as a full-blown "working woman". She is condescending towards the other women who are merely home-makers or just plain elderly and she never lets an opportunity pass by to remind them of the same. The menfolk of the house are also rather cowardly and indifferent, like many of their class (according to the women), since they barely take care of the house maintenance or complain to the wealthy neighbour next door about his daughter's bad manners. The women also grumble incessantly about using coal ovens and the smoke it produces— this is also a reason for the long-standing quarrel with the wealthy neighbour. They do show some solidarity occasionally, of course, as when they decide to pool funds to celebrate Romen's son's birth, but such events seem to be relatively uncommon.



Poverty The film also touches on the class struggles of the lower class. Though the lower-middle-class characters are certainly struggling financially, they are much better off than some of the random characters Dipu meets outside his home, each with their own quirks despite living in poverty. For instance, there's the boy from the tea stall, who's essentially a child labourer at a hotel. In exchange for working all day, the boy gets two meals and a place to sleep. The few rupees he earns in wages every month is promptly taken by his family members, who live in a rural area. But he's happy with his lot, smart and quick with his wits and Dipu is impressed enough by him in the short meeting to remember him in the dream. Similarly, the palmist Shivaprasad, a retired government servant, is now reduced to living in a room in a slum, where he leads Dipu. The latter is greatly discomfited by the narrow, stinking pathways and ramshackle, single rooms all clumped up together, as in a typical slum. At an advanced age, Shivaprasad has to support his deceased son's family on the meagre earnings from his business telling futures and selling cheap devotional jewellery at high prices. His slum room is cluttered with worn-out, torn clothes and furnishings and we even see his half-naked grandchildren and poorly clad daughter-in-law. He is a broken man, not only because of the loss of his grown son, but also because he's "broken" and reduced to these circumstances— and he can definitely sympathize with his palmistry clients, who are basically just looking for some hope and kind words. Dipu interacts with just one more lower-class character, the grumbling taxi driver, but he only finds Dipu whimsical and drives off. Some general city scenes also capture parts of the day-to-day lives of the poorest of its residents— rickshaw pullers, shoe shiners, horse-buggy drivers, fritter fryers and so on— but they blend into the cityscape and aren't individuated to any degree. These other characters certainly have it worse than Dipu and his lower-middle-class neighbours, but Dipu's somewhat disinterested response to their lives doesn't allow the viewer to develop much interest in them.



Dishonesty One unifying theme in the film is dishonesty— specifically people pretending to be of a different class by changing their appearance or behaviour. The film opens with the perfect example— the well-dressed, elite, smart man who kindly offers Dipu a place to stay as there was no transport in the middle of the night. Nothing in the man's appearance or his affable manner would suggest his class reality: he lives in a building that is in a worse state of wear than Dipu's tenement house, occupies a single, dingy, tiny room and sheds his fine clothes— quite like the proverbial crow shedding its peacock feathers— to reveal his poverty through torn under-shirt and worn-out drawers. Dipu is simultaneously alienated yet interested by this chance meeting, but doesn't reflect on it to any degree.

Later, Dipu meets Shivaprasad, who has no qualms in fleecing rich, foreign hippie tourists with his fake spirituality and predictions of the future based on the lines of the palm. His "I can speak English" signboard is of great help in his palmistry business— though he doesn't seem to know any more than a basic smattering of the language. During his conversation with Dipu, we are shown a flashback where he sells a fake dried seeds necklace that serves as holy prayer beads or a fashion accessory for pretentious religiosity, for a whopping sum of Rs 50, claiming that it was divinely blessed. Here, Shivaprasad's dishonesty in cheating the young hippie couple is reflected in his unstated disdain for the sham spirituality that they profess. The film certainly seems to suggest that the hippie couple deserve to be cheated, though Dipu himself doesn't condone Shivaprasad's dishonesty.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) What picture of lower-middle class life does the film paint? Discuss one striking aspect that is unfamiliar to you.

2) Do you think Dipu is a strong protagonist? Why or why not?

3) Who was the most interesting character in the film that you would have liked to know more about?

4) Do you think that the editor is justified to demand that every story published must sell?

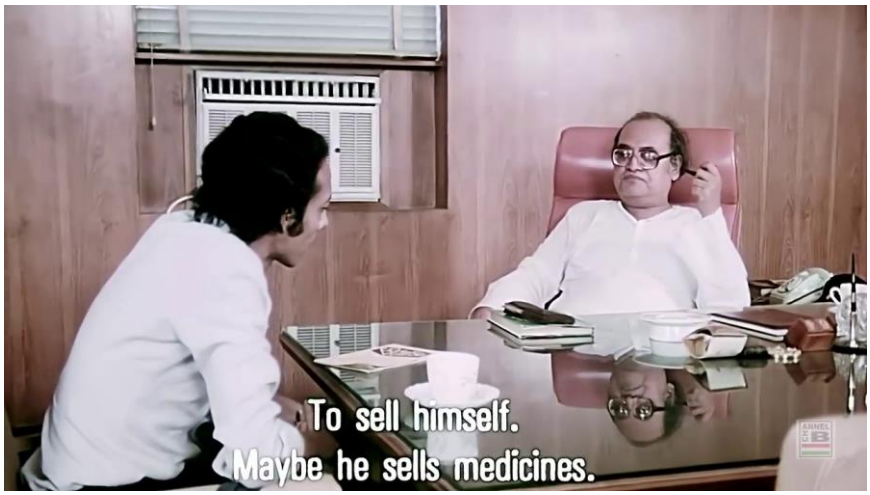
5) How would you analyse the dream sequence at the end? Does it have a clear "message"? If so, what?

SCENES

A peacock-feathered crow The voice-over narrator and protagonist, Dipu, details his dilemma in finding transport back home in Kolkata at midnight. An unknown but smart and urbane gentleman insists that Dipu spend the night at his home and take the tram the next morning. He is so insistent that the narrator follows him to his home. It is a tiny room in a dilapidated tenement house. The man's appearance and behaviour are completely at odds with his room. The man carefully undresses and hangs up his nice clothes, much to Dipu's discomfort, and reveals a torn undershirt and old drawers. Dipu says, "Thus the smart, urban, elite man got almost naked and turned poor."



A meeting with a newspaper editor Dipu meets with a famous newspaper editor. They cordially discuss the story above and Dipu's background. The editor's son, Rahul, and Dipu are friends. The editor says, "We're all living in disguise like clowns". Dipu is unhappy with his current job— low pay, no prospects—and would like a job at the newspaper office. Rahul phones his father to enquire if Dipu had shown up.



A long-lost friend One of his friends accidentally sees Dipu at a bus stop and gives him a ride in his car. They haven't met in a long time.

Interview continues Dipu praises an article on rickshaw pullers that appeared in the newspaper last week. The editor tells Dipu that their job is to sell such stories to the malleable public. Everything everyone does is to sell papers, just like the poor man decked up in nice clothes— the world itself is a shopping centre. The editor assigns Dipu to write a story about his "clan"— his middle-class life, its people and spaces— in two days' time. "It must sell", he reiterates.

“Forgive them, father” Dipu briskly walks and then runs across a busy crossing in the heart of the city. The camera zooms on a billboard by the YMCA, with Jesus on the cross and the words: “Jesus said ‘Forgive them father! For they don’t know what they are doing.’ Luke 23:34”.



An accident At home in a tenement house, Dipu’s mother falls on the slippery courtyard. Dipu tries to help her up. The female neighbours come to check. Maa sends them away as the place is full of broken glass, moss and rice starch that someone had thrown there. An argument erupts between Kalpana, a schoolteacher, and the other neighbours. Kalpana’s daughter is the possible culprit for carelessly throwing away the starch after it was used to starch her sarees.



Scrubbing the courtyard Dipu and Maa argue as seems typical for them. He asks about any injuries and she complains that no one in the tenement house bothers to clean anything. Dipu pulls her away from the bathroom, where she is washing up, to show her that Kalpana is loudly scrubbing the courtyard floor, with many women neighbours watching. Maa quickly joins, glaring at Kalpana. Soon enough, all the others join in, as if it’s a competition. Dipu beams, watching. He rushes to get a photographer friend to take a picture of the women frantically scrubbing, but arrives too late and misses the moment— the courtyard is scrubbed and spotless, not a neighbour in sight.



An interview with Maa At night, while Maa is busy cooking, Dipu interviews her about her reaction to the furore in the afternoon. She says that even if all of them got angry, it's for the best as there's likely to be no more mishaps. He tells her that he's writing a newspaper story about people like themselves. He gives up trying to explain it to her and instead says that it's something the people should swallow. Maa is mystified at the expression.

Too much smoke Dipu wants to open the window to let out the smoke, but Maa protests, saying that their neighbours in the "big house" next door are offended. They argue. Maa angrily tells him not to bother now after all the fighting with the neighbours is over and he has never even looked into the kitchen to see its condition. He asks her, "Don't your eyes burn from the smoke?" and she replies, "Then you should buy me a gas stove. Can you?"

Coal thief Later in the night, Dipu begins a handwritten draft titled "Kaleidoscope of the Middle Class" but doesn't get anywhere. Instead, bothered by mosquitoes, he sprays his room with insect repellent, annoying his younger brother, Apu. He then goes outside to the veranda and sees an old woman stealing their coal. Dipu asks Apu if he understood why she was stealing the coal— that it was for his story. He tells Apu to wake up their mother and relay what happened, without mentioning him. But Apu tells her everything and she is annoyed that they just let the old woman take the coal. But it's too late at night to confront her, Maa says.





The neighbours are annoyed The next morning, the neighbour women complain about the heat while washing dishes at the courtyard communal water tank. One of the women has left a smoking oven in the courtyard, and the smoke makes the young lady of the “big house” next door furious. The women keep grumbling about rich people and Maa says everyone should compromise. She gets Apu to help her bring their coal inside as the old woman watches. When Apu looks at the thief, she reprimands him and asks him to look away.





An eventful morning Maa then wakes up Dipu who’s sleeping in. Dipu’s father, Baba, is at the fish market, looking at live fish. At the tenement house, a man gargles loudly while standing on the veranda as a bespectacled young woman hangs out a sari on the railing. At the floor below, Maa asks Baba if he bought *neem* leaves from the market. Kalpana tells her daughter to fetch the oil canister from a room where her husband is doing an upside-down yoga pose. He is very annoyed at the door being left ajar.



A shower of torn paper The girl who lives in the “big house” empties a trash can of torn-up paper into the courtyard. Kalpana and the other women tell her to stop, but she ignores them. Dipu watches, amused. The girl’s taking revenge for the smoke earlier, one woman says. A little boy plays with the paper pieces before he’s shooed away and another lady sweeps it up. Kalpana says that the men in the tenement are too cowardly to go and argue with the owner next door. Maa tells Dipu to stop watching the fun and go inside.

An argument with Maa Rows of typists are at work at an office. A wall with angry graffiti messages is shown. Dipu asks mother for some tea. She is annoyed that he hasn’t emptied his ashtray. She takes his laundry. Dipu alleges she’s not cooperating with him by not giving him material for the story. She responds that it’s not decent to create a fuss about the courtyard or the coal thief.

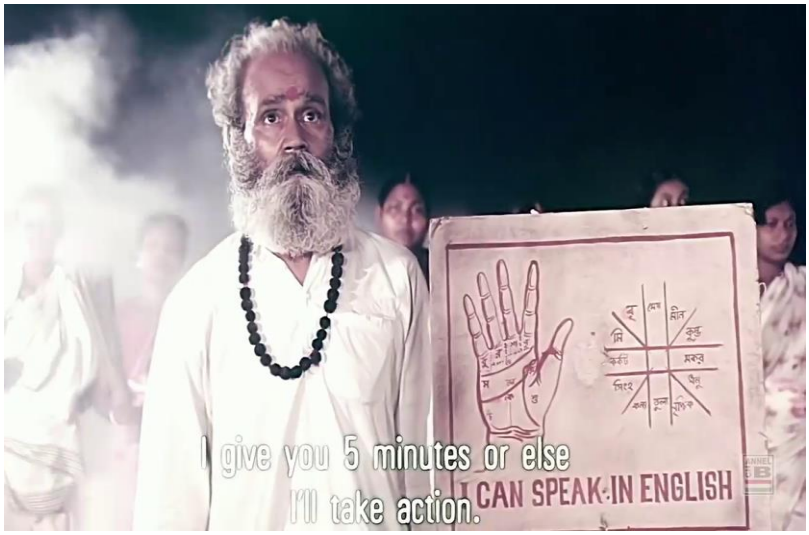
Helping a neighbour A bespectacled young woman calls away Maa as her sister-in-law isn’t well. Her brother, Romen, tells neighbours that his wife is in labour. Maa tells Romen to take his wife to the hospital immediately. Dipu goes with Romen to fetch a cab. They frantically try to flag down a cab for some time at a busy crossing. Dipu sends Romen home to his wife and keeps running around. By the time he returns with a cab, the couple have already left in a rickshaw.

Maa gets new steel utensils Dipu takes a ride in the taxi around the city since he already had to pay the minimum fare. He drinks tea at a stall and tips the young boy serving him. He returns home to see Maa haggling with a couple of women who sell and exchange shiny new steel kitchen utensils for old clothes and saris. Back in his room, he searches for his brown pants, but Maa has already sold them to the utensil-sellers for a good bargain. She says that no one uses bronze metal utensils anymore and asks Dipu for five rupees, which he gives her, grumbling.



An interview with an old palmistry practitioner, Shivaprasad Bhattacharya Out in the city again, Dipu observes a couple of foreign tourists getting their future told by an old, bearded palm reader with a board “I can speak in English”. Dipu asks him for an interview and follows him to his ramshackle hovel in a slum. He lives with his daughter-in-law and grandchildren; his son has passed away. The old man worked as a peon at a British company and has been a priest for the last 10 years, which is his hereditary profession, though it doesn’t pay well. He says that all the people he meets in his fortune-telling work are broken and damaged like him— they only want to hear words of hope.





No luck for Dipu’s story The “I can speak in English” board also gets Shivaprasad rich customers, like the foreign couple earlier to whom he sold a fake “God-gifted” necklace for 50 Rupees. Dipu seems disappointed as he leaves. Dipu tells him that he won’t write the article on the palmist as he doesn't want to expose the fraud and insult him publicly. Shivaprasad is disgruntled.

“How many ovens are there in Kolkata?” We are shown a quick succession of shots featuring the busy city— shoe shiners, coconut-water sellers, horses pulling a buggy, fruit market, fritters being fried in hot oil, a rickshaw-puller sleeping on his vehicle—ending in a bird’s eye view of the slum that Dipu is observing. “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” plays in the background. Apu, standing next to him, asks, “How many ovens are there in Kolkata?” This sparks the beginning of a feature story for Dipu. Later that evening, Dipu reads out a few sentences he’s written, focusing on the plight of women who use these poisonous coal ovens, but feels that it’s too “essayish”.

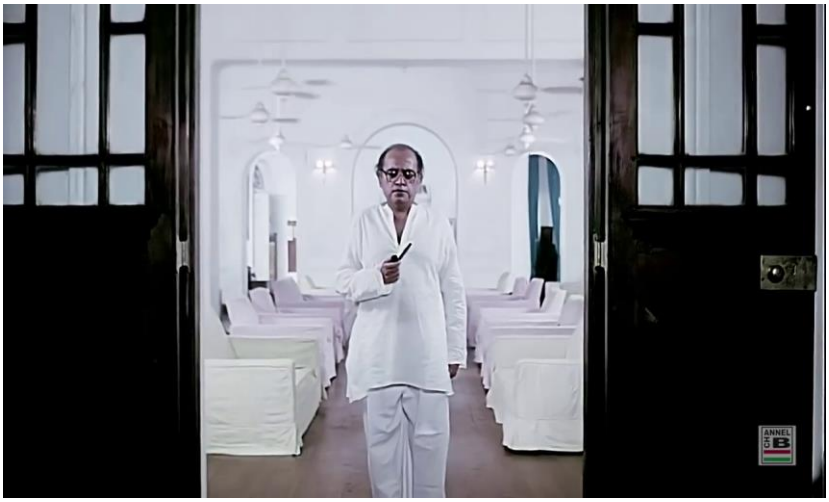


Romen has a son Romen wife has had a son. All the women say they want to pool in and buy sweets. Romen looks shy and not at all excited.

Dipu plays a prank Dipu opens the kitchen window and stuffs the oven full of coal, so that the smoke goes towards the house next door. Maa is annoyed but curious and ends up helping him to make more smoke, then watches for the reaction. But the man next door only closes the windows.



Dipu has a dream Dipu dreams that the editor is reading a book entitled “The Possible Dream” by Marthe Gross. Then he walks down a pristine white room with fans and onto the balcony of a beautiful bungalow. in an open field in front of him, women, including Maa, the tenement house women and girls in school uniform, carry smoking coal ovens and brooms. The editor calls for the police, yelling that he has been assaulted. Sirens sound. The police arrive and tell them to leave the premises. Old Shivaprasad runs across the field shouting “I have come”. The boy from the tea stall also runs in, along with Dipu’s photographer friend.





The dream continues The women keep standing there in the billowing smoke. The police officer phones a superior and tells them that they can't use batons as the women are holding brooms. He has a round of tear gas shot. The women cackle loudly. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" again plays in the background. Fire brigade trucks with more constables arrive; they spray water. Smoke returns to coal ovens in reverse motion as the water sprays. Soon, only rows of coal ovens remain, with the palmist's advertisement board and a cup of tea balanced on a stick. Dipu wakes up.







Meeting the editor again The next morning, Dipu goes to the newspaper office again. The editor says that he failed the assignment. Dipu describes the dream to the editor. The editor tells him to write a story on smoke and pollution. “Smoke is a positive nuisance,” he says excitedly. Dipu says that everyone he knows and sees uses coal ovens and can’t afford gas ovens, going on with fervour on the topic. The editor suddenly says, “You’re a communist...you wanted a good start, a respectable salary.”



Dipu gets the job Machines print newspapers. Dipu gets an appointment letter in the mail. Rows of typists typeset newsprint. Dipu asks Maa while she’s cooking, “Don’t your eyes burn?” She replies, “Now you are earning more. Why not buy a gas oven? Will you get me one?”



Closing scene— Maa gets a gas oven A couple of men bring a gas oven and cylinder. Maa shows them in. All the neighbours watch. Smoke billows over the slums to the end credits with “Somewhere over the Rainbow” in the background.

