HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE RUNAWAY (lit. RUN AWAY FROM HOME) BARI THEKE PALIYE (1959)
Ritwik Ghatak

Bengali language

Film link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfHHmkB-zNs





OVERVIEW

Director Ritwik Ghatak was born in Dacca (in present-day Bangladesh), and his family moved to Kolkata just before masses of starving people streamed into the city as a result of the famine of 1943-44 and the partition of 1947-48. Those two events, along with the Bangladesh war in 1971, which also brought refuges to Kolkata, would dominate most of Ghatak's films. He became politically active in the IPTA (Indian Peoples Theatre Association) in the 1950s before entering the world of film as an assistant director and making his directorial debut in 1953 with *Citizen* (*Nagarik*), which went unreleased but is considered a classic today. Ghatak joined and was then purged from the Communist Party of India, after which he became a prolific writer of short stories, plays and film theory. He directed one of the all-time great films of Indian cinema with *The Cloud-Capped Star* (*Meghe Dhaka Tara,* 1960). Along with Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen, he charted a Bengali film industry that reflected the turbulent politics of his day and surpassed Bollywood in its social realism. His personal life was however rocky; he suffered from mental illness and alcoholism and even sold his film reels to shady producers for money and alcohol— leading to many of his film prints being recovered in unusable condition and having to be restored.

Ghatak directed eight full-length feature films (of which only seven were publicly released) and a handful of documentaries, which depict the lives of ordinary and marginal people. *The Cloud-Capped Star* (*Meghe Dhaka Tara*) was listed at number 231 in a list of all-time best films by Sight and Sound in 2002, while *Golden Lining* (*Subarnarekha*) was listed at 346. Ghatak also received many awards in India, including the National Film Award for Best Story in 1974 and a Padma Shri from the Indian government in 1970.

Film
Bari Theke Paliye (*The Runaway*) is based on the 1937 novel of the same name by renowned author and humorist Shibram Chakraborty. There are some similarities in plot and character to François Truffaut's *400 Blows* (also released in 1959), but Ghatak's film remained obscure while Truffaut's went on to become one of the most famous of the French New Wave. It was Ghatak's third feature film but the first to signal a deeper search for something beyond the alienation of everyday life. *Runaway* is a philosophical film set in the aftermath of Partition and one of Ghatak's many films on the

consequences of that cataclysmic event, explored here through the eyes of a naughty and inquisitive boy who runs away from home to escape his father's perpetual wrath. Through a critique of the urban life in both its positive and negative aspects, the boy, who had stars in his eyes about Kolkata, is gradually disillusioned, but does not completely lose his innocence. Instead, he realises the value of the simple and peaceful village lifestyle he left behind and is relieved to find it intact upon his return.

Background *Runaway* remains one of Ghatak's least watched and appreciated films. Ghatak used three top comedians from the Bangla film industry in *Runaway:* Kali Bannerjee as Horidas (who returns after *Ajantrik*), Keshto Mukherjee as the magician and Jahar Roy as the traffic policeman. Music by renowned composer Salil Chowdhury, especially the *bulbul bhaja* song, is well-loved even today and the credits appearing alongside (theatre personality and artist) Khaled Choudhury's brilliant "child art" depicting scenes from the film remain memorable. Critic Derek Malcom writes: "The film is seen through the naive eyes of the child with sharpness as well as sentiment: I saw it only without subtitles, and would hesitate to comment further, save to say that Ghatak's attempt to prove his point about innocence never being wholly corrupted seems only partially successful." It was shown at the Venice Film Festival in 1960.

SYNOPSIS

Kanchan, a very naughty village boy and the strict school headmaster's son, spends his days imagining himself an adventurer, being coddled by his mother and playing pranks on everyone. One day, after a particularly annoying prank, he gets too afraid of being beaten by his father and runs away to Kolkata. There he meets a series of wholesome characters, especially the snack-seller cum entertainer Horidas, a Bangladeshi refugee who takes Kanchan under his wing, and the little girl Mini, the only child of an affluent family whose mother suffers and ultimately collapses from a chronic illness. Random strangers also show kindness, like a middle-aged lady who lost her son, a labourer who feeds Kanchan and a boy forced to work for a child kidnapper syndicate. Of course, there are unsavoury characters too, like Mini's older cousin, who mocks him for his faulty English, goons who beat him up and threaten him with a knife, and the restaurant owner who smacks him for not being able to pay for his meal. Through all of this, Kanchan learns that city life isn't as wondrous as he had imagined it and is actually full of suffering, hunger, unfairness and pain, He misses his mother terribly. Finally, Mini's father sees a notice in the newspaper and sends Kanchan's father a telegram with his whereabouts. Horidas gets him on a train, which takes him home, where his mother is overjoyed and his father is penitent. He tells them that his home is the best place and continues on with his usual naughtiness, but having learned that things aren't as easy as they seem.

CHARACTERS

Kanchan	A naughty village boy, the "runaway"
Maa	Kanchan's mother
Baba	Kanchan's father
Binod Thakur	Kanchan's best friend and the village priest's son
Horidas	A snacks seller
Magician	Named Ishu Bhelkiwala
Mini	A young girl Kanchan meets.
Mini's parents	

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Kanchan

Kanchan, a naughty young village boy, is the protagonist of *The Runaway.* He is extremely imaginative and adventurous, with a sharp wit that often befuddles adults; still, he is determined to achieve his goal.

Naughty Kanchan is renowned in his village for being an especially naughty boy. He's always disobeying rules, like skipping school and stealing food offered to the household deity. He doesn't hesitate to play pranks on his best friend Binod, either, splashing him while playing in the water or upturning a full bowl of yogurt on his head. Although they make up later, the adults around them don't look upon these acts kindly.

Imaginative Kanchan is also extremely imaginative. From the Hindu epics to El Dorado, he is indiscriminately fascinated by anything that goes beyond his usual humdrum daily life. His favourite

book is on El Dorado and he tells everyone who will listen about the golden city and poisoned arrows shot by savage tribals. He imagines Kolkata to be a city of lights and easy riches and even thinks that it'll be fun to be abducted by child kidnappers and go on an adventure. He also daydreams improbable situations about sending gifts to his mother and bringing Mini home as a bride.

Witty Kanchan never misses a beat in responding wittily no matter the situation. Binod, Horidas, the lady with a missing child and the restaurant owner, among others, praise his street-smart replies, though the latter is not at all pleased. Later, when Mini asks him to spell in English, he turns the tables on her by asking her to spell the name of a demoness in Bengali and then, when she fails, calls her by that name. Sometimes, of course, this backfires; for instance, he tells Binod that he'll strangle Chanakya for laying down harsh rules that Baba enforces, not knowing that Chanakya was an ancient Indian polymath and strategist and forever beyond his grasp.

Determined No matter the hardship, Kanchan is determined to earn money in Kolkata so that he can buy a few small luxuries for his mother. He happily sleeps outside on a park bench or the porch of someone's house, goes without a bath for a few days and gets fed at the mercy of strangers. In order to meet his goal, no job is too low for him. He agrees to run an alcohol shop, tries to become the magician's apprentice, hatches a business plan with the boy Raja to paint the streets, and tries to break up coal to sell.

Empathetic Kanchan is a soft-hearted boy despite his tough exterior, and he's easily moved by the plight of others, though he may not be in a position to help them, being a runaway himself with no means. He is shocked and saddened by a family of refugees scavenging a trash can for food after the wedding and later, when the woman who was kind to him is beaten up by passers-by and handed over to the police, he tries to stop them but fails. He cannot fathom why there is so much pain in the city.

Horidas

Horidas is an entertainer who's beloved of the local children. He takes Kanchan under his wing upon meeting him and stays by the boy's side, guiding him as best as he can though the trials he faces.

Charming When out on his route selling his famous *bulbul bhaja*, (a spicy snack mixture) Horidas dresses up as a Santa Claus-like old man, with bushy white hair and a flowing beard, a long cloak and a voluminous, quilted tote bag. He tells Kanchan that the disguise was so that children wouldn't be afraid of him. Indeed, whenever he arrives at his slum, all the local children gather around him, asking for songs and snacks. He even captures the upper-class, sheltered Mini's affection in a heartbeat.

Caring Despite being a bachelor with no family, Horidas is a very caring person as seen in his interactions with Kanchan. He follows the boy around as much as possible and manages to find him after Kanchan runs away to follow his dreams. He lets Kanchan sleep in his hovel and guides him, advising him to return to his parents. But he can't accompany him back to the village, as his role is to help all the runaways like Kanchan, he says.

Sad Beneath his jovial exterior, Horidas is a deeply sad and nostalgic man. He was a schoolteacher in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) but had to leave his home as a refugee during the Partition and didn't find a job for ten years. He almost starts crying while telling Kanchan that his mother also "ran away" when he was very young—which could mean anything from being abducted to dying, but of course he wouldn't expose a child to those painful truths. He says he saw her (that is, women like her) again and again, covered in mud, in the roads and alleys of the "funny city" Kolkata—an evocative image of the thousands who streamed into the city with nothing, hoping for the best, but like the family scavenging from the trash can, finding only the worst.

THEMES

The postcolonial child Kanchan is not an isolated character but an unmissable example of "the naughty boy" in Bengali children's literature. Far from being a minor or generic category, Bengali children's literature, which boasts a long and accomplished literary history*, has always imagined the child to be/become the future of the nation. As such, from the early colonial era onwards, both British and Indian intelligentsia focused on how to mould the ideal child: for the British, he would be a compliant subject; for the Indian reformers, he would helm the nation later. From Macaulay and Bentham to Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Rammohan Roy and Rabindranath Tagore— all worked to

circumscribe the ideal child. For Vidyasagar, the template was *subodh balak,* the boy who followed the rules and was duly rewarded, as seen in the parable of Gopal and Rakhal*. Rakhal, Gopal's nemesis, is a naughty boy who is never redeemed and always punished. In the late colonial period, outliers like Khagendranath Mitra's Bhombol Sardar begin raising their rebellious heads; Bhombol is an incorrigible teenager who runs away again and again on various adventures and is never tamed. As such, Kanchan's character can be read only in this context where all these options were available as models but he fully chooses none. Instead, as a child of a newly formed nation, he dreams of a better life for his mother (and metaphorically for Mother Nation) and is empathetic to the plight of the homeless and the lowest of the low. It is also quite interesting how Ghatak picks up on the Gandhian formulation of Ram and Sita as the ideal couple-ruler of an imagined *Ramrajya* (kingdom of Ram) that Gandhi envisioned the newly formed nation to become: Kanchan, while never explicitly comparing himself to Ram, does wish to bring back a bride like Sita.

*There is hardly a single mainstream Bengali author since the colonial period who hasn't tried his/her hand at children's literature.

* The interested reader may peruse Sibaji Bandyopadhyay's incisive *Gopal-Rakhal Dialectic* (Columbia UP, 2015, translated) which analyses, among other things, how children's literature was mobilized to the cause of the nation seeking independence.

The Partition The Partition of 1947-1948, which led to the creation of India and East and West Pakistan, is a potent and recurring theme in Ghatak's films. Here, while Kanchan remains directly unaffected, other characters and situations help us reflect on the enormity of that tragedy. Horidas, for instance, having already lost his mother in childhood, laments the loss of his home and his job, all taken in one fell swoop, leaving him a refugee wandering the Kolkata streets for over a decade. The itinerant folk singer also nostalgically sings about the lost pre-Partition home. A refugee family fights with the stray dogs to scrounge in the trash can for leftover food from the wedding at Mini's house, shocking Kanchan. We also see another perspective, that of the local residents who don't take kindly to the refugees. For instance, one of the unemployed youth at the tea restaurant quotes the famous poem by Annada Shankar Ray: "You get angry at the little girl for breaking a bottle of oil, but when you big old boys break the country apart, then what about it?" They are left jobless, hanging around and complaining about the Partition, living like ghosts lamenting the loss of the magic of "old Kolkata".

Coming of age This is the story of Kanchan's coming of age, not physically but emotionally, quite in the mould of a hero's journey of facing and overcoming various obstacles and returning home a winner. The first trial is obviously foregoing the usual comforts of home like regular meals or a bed to sleep on, not to mention his mother's love and care. But Kanchan's successes are only small and temporary; although he manages to become friends with Horidas and Mini, both are lost to him in the end. He meets many people, some kind, some dangerous; in that teeming and chaotic city, his presence and acquaintance leave little impact on those he meets, though perhaps a larger impact on his own psyche. His innocent mind, previously sheltered from the realities of life, is struck again and again with the human tragedies he witnesses; he cannot understand why most people are so uncaring and exploitative. As the old labourer tells him, "You've got to tolerate a lot here. In this place, whether you feel angry or try to live with pride or cry, there is no one to look after you. This place is meant for struggle." So, finally when he abandons his dream of making money in Kolkata and returns home, his mother's warm embrace and his father's remorseful welcome make him realize that "home is the best". What he doesn't realize as clearly, of course, is that he is actually extremely lucky to even have that home to return to, unlike Horidas. The last scene, where Kanchan dons Horidas's garb and rows away on a boat, can thus be interpreted as him continuing Horidas's work, though, it is difficult to say for certain if he would cease his usual rambunctious behaviour.

Parenthood We are shown snippets of two very different family lives in the film. Kanchan's own family life is very disturbed and unbalanced by today's standards. His father is a disciplinarian who doesn't hesitate to lock him outside at night or beat him or shout at his him and his mother. Although we are never shown any scenes of (physical) domestic violence or child abuse, the broader idea is that one must not "spare the rod and spoil the child", something that many South Asian parents continue to believe in and practice. In contrast, Maa is his safe haven— the person he can confide in without reservation and who takes the best care of him and shelters him from his father's wrath. In contrast, Mini's family contains an ailing and sensitive mother and a caring and concerned father, whose biggest joy is his wife and daughter and biggest passion is seeing them happy. Mini herself is a sweet and caring girl, but is perhaps too coddled and sheltered by her parents. She quickly befriends a stranger like Kanchan without knowing anything about his background and despite his often sharp

tongue. Kanchan feels that Mini's mother truly understands him; she opens up to him a little about her illness and missing her village home. He also tells Mini, "Actually your father has the hidden soul of a mother". The two fathers couldn't be more different in appearance and behaviour, either: Kanchan's dad has a rough-and-tough, angry-village-school-headmaster look and is most comfortable in traditional clothes, while Mini's father is soft-spoken and has a well-shaved (if slightly effeminate) "urban gentleman" look and prefers western attire. But regardless of these differences, both sets of parents have the best interests of their children at heart, though it's easy to see that one is too authoritative and the other too permissive.

City life versus Village life City life is chaotic while rural life is idyllic. Kanchan himself is the most chaotic element in the lives of all his family and friends. Their days pass by slowly with much time for leisure and bonding, like all the time Kanchan spends with Maa and Binod, and much time for play and naughtiness as well. The wide-open natural spaces and special hiding spots around the village also give us an impression of freedom and the space to breathe. But Kanchan is burdened by his father's anger and frequent punishments, and the village itself feels like a prison to him. In contrast, city life is teeming with many different kinds of people, from the poorest homeless refugees, to criminals to the lower and lower middle-class refugees like Horidas and the kind lady, and upper middle-class families like Mini's family. Of course, there are unfamiliar objects and unexpected events, too. A young boy like Kanchan is easily swallowed up in all this chaos. In fact, he is extremely lucky to have encountered Horidas and spared by the child kidnappers and other unsavoury characters and able to return home with emotional, not physical scars. There is, of course, a great deal of nostalgic romanticism in the depiction of rural life and this theme recurs in Ghatak's oeuvre. Whether the idyllic rural life represented in the film is based on a factual village of 1960's Bengal is open to question, with the village nearly untouched by modernity (excepting trains). Regardless, the imagined village is a repository of nostalgia for Horidas and Mini's mother, not to mention the contemporary viewer. The very act of running away, which was quite common up until the 1980's, has also petered out socially. After the advent of internet, social media and smartphones, running away from home for an adventure just doesn't seem very appealing to youngsters any more.

Adventure Kanchan is an adventurous soul, finding wonder and enjoyment in the smallest of things. Every day is an adventure for him; whether in finding new ways to escape his humdrum school routine by stealing a boat or in annoying his best friend or in trying to escape from his father's iron fist. His favourite book is on the fabled El Dorado, which Maa disapproves of and he begs her to keep a secret from his father. He loves describing scenes from that book, particularly to the house servant, who's easily frightened by hearing about deadly forests, savage tribes and their poisoned arrows. These tales of exotic, faraway lands, usually translated into Bengali from European colonialist narratives, are omnipresent in Bengali children's literature. These stories inadvertently skewed the perspectives of entire generations of Bengali readers on these foreign lands, though some Bengali authors explicitly attempted to question and undermine their embedded colonialist, racist and exploitative views. Ghatak (and Shibram, on whose novel the film is based), however, sidesteps the issue in favour of exploring home-grown adventures in the nearest metropolis. Not that Kanchan's runaway adventure in the big city isn't full of dangers to life and limb, but it's still within the pale of the possible and familiar, and thus Kanchan, with his charming smile, street-smart wit and high degree of adaptability is able to make his way through the "funny city" that is Kolkata.

Strangers It's common to see films about family, friends, work colleagues and the private life of its protagonist, but in this film strangers play a much more significant role. From Horidas to the kind labourer, Mini to the supposedly mute boy Raja, the child kidnapper and the coal-yard goons—Kanchan meets a gamut of characters who are, as to be expected, positive, negative or neutral towards him. But not even the most minor character is reducible to a class or location or some other trope. For instance, even within Mini's family, we have her kind and gentle parents and her caustic older cousin, who doesn't hesitate to humiliate Kanchan, a stranger and much younger than him, for not knowing enough English, unsurprisingly revealing his own hidden insecurity in never being able to become "westernized enough". We have another upper middle-class character, the obese man who eats too much at the restaurant, but who slinks away instead of paying for Kanchan's meal that he could have afforded easily. Again, Raja's criminal master and the kind labourer also belong to the same socioeconomic class but are totally divergent in their intentions towards Kanchan. Then again, the traffic policeman and the magician are neutral towards Kanchan. In Kanchan's inexperienced eyes, most people he knows in the village are of about the same socioeconomic status and there isn't much ambiguity in "normal" middle-class families, their servants and the marginal indigenous folk. So

coming into Kolkata, he only slowly learns to treat people according to their intentions and background. It cannot be reiterated enough (especially in contrast to *400 Blows*) how lucky Kanchan was to receive such kindness from strangers on his runaway adventure.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) Do you think Kanchan was justified in running away from home? Would you have done something similar in the same circumstances?

2) Why does Kanchan trust Horidas at first sight?

3) Discuss Kanchan's home life in comparison to Mini's, especially the last scenes with them together.

4) Which two minor characters do you think were most impactful for Kanchan's coming-of-age experience and why?

SCENES

Kanchan is punished Kanchan, a young boy, complains to his mother that his father scolds him too much. He tells her his fantasies of marrying a beautiful wife like the mythical Sita, Ram's wife, which she approves. She disapproves of him reading a book on El Dorado and he pleads with her to not tell his father. Just as he is sitting down to eat supper and nodding off, his father grabs him by the ear and throws him outside the house for stealing and eating sweets offered to the household deity. Maa pleads with his father to let him in, but he refuses, saying that her family spoils the boy and he can't allow that in his own house, where rules must be followed. After sometime, Kanchan is let in again with a stern warning. He is frightened and crying but cheers right up when Maa handfeeds him.

Kanchan bullies another boy The next morning, Kanchan walks on a narrow bamboo bridge and then bullies a bigger boy (Binod, his friend) who was bathing in the river. Binod, clambering out, curses Kanchan to fail all his exams by holding and pulling on his sacred thread, which breaks. Binod hurriedly ties it up as otherwise his father (the village priest) would beat him up. Kanchan tells him, "I'll show you when I'm on my way to school". Later, Kanchan ambushes Binod who's on the way to the temple with food offerings. Binod tries to pacify him by telling him to not be forceful, but Kanchan upends the bowl of yogurt on his head. Binod starts wailing.





Kanchan steals a boat Sometime later, a house servant comes looking for *chhoto babu* ('young master', i.e., Kanchan). Kanchan is in the meanwhile stealing a boat. He tells the servant about South America and poisonous arrows, frightening him. The servant tells him that his father returned from school (where he teaches) and has the whip ready after hearing what Kanchan did to Binod and that he skipped school. Maa is crying because she was also yelled at. Kanchan must be dragged back he if doesn't return, says the servant, before leaving.



Kanchan and Binod make up Binod confronts Kanchan but offers him a spinning top and they make up. Kanchan apologizes for hurting Binod and promises never to do it again. Binod also promises not to complain to Kanchan's father and empathizes with how much he gets beaten up. Kanchan says he's going to strangle Chanakya [a mythical figure] if he finds the guy, as his father keeps referring to Chanakya's rules.



Kanchan fantasizes about Kolkata Kanchan says he will go to Kolkata, a wondrous city where nights are as bright as days and he'll earn lots of money there for buying new sarees and jewellery for Maa, as his father says those are luxuries and doesn't buy her anything. Kanchan wants Maa to look pretty and be nice to him. Binod refuses Kanchan's offer to run away together as he's scared of child kidnappers with long beards who nab kids at any opportunity. Kanchan wants to be abducted and have an adventure like going to El Dorado. Suddenly, his father is heard angrily shouting Kanchan's name. The boys scramble away.



Kanchan reaches Kolkata At night, Kanchan rides a boat into Kolkata and reaches Howrah Bridge early in the morning. We see busy, crowded street with bullock carts, trams, buses, cars and crowds of people. Kanchan is lost and almost gets run over. A man with a long white beard and cloak saves him and asks why he ran away. The man offers Kanchan a job of manning his friend's liquor store.

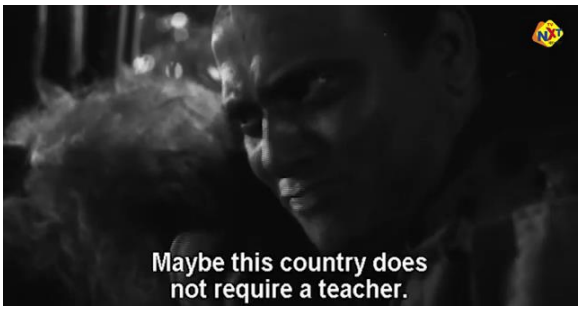


Horidas They walk to a slum-like area and many boys come running out shouting the old man's name, Horidas. Horidas entertains them by signing the iconic and funny "*horidas er bulubul bhaja*" song about his tasty *bulbul bhaja* (a spicy mixture of puffed rice, peanuts, fried lentil fritters and chickpeas). Among its many merits that the song proclaims, this famous mixture was supposedly ordered by Queen Victoria who ate it instead of her meals. Horidas brings Kanchan into his hovel and takes off his fake beard and hair, revealing a young man. Kanchan is startled, but says that Hori will need a bigger sack to abduct him. Hori starts laughing after being accused of being a kidnapper. He was a schoolteacher who "ran away" from his home in Pakistan [he's a Partition refugee] and didn't find a job for ten years. He almost starts crying while telling Kanchan that his mother also "ran away" when he was very young. He saw her again and again, covered in mud, in the roads and alleys of the "funny city" Kolkata. Kanchan breaks his monologue by demanding food. Hori leaves, telling Kanchan to stay put lest he meet a real child kidnapper.









Kanchan meets the Magician Suddenly, Kanchan hears someone call out "King of Ghosts, be under my spell" and rushes outside. It's a man pretending to tame a ghost— but a boy (skin darkened all over with some paint) jumps out of the big basket and tries to run away. The magician grabs him and stuffs him back into the basket, then runs a sword through the cloth covering the basket. But the boy emerges unscathed! The magician then pulls out an egg from behind Kanchan's ear. After the show, Kanchan asks him to teach him magic. The magician says he'll need different clothes and to go to his place in the evening. Kanchan is told that he has to go down the road for a way and ask for the Magician by his name, Ishu Bhelkiwala, and he'll be shown the way.





At a restaurant Out on the busy street, Kanchan meets a man ravenously eating copious amounts of food at a small restaurant. The shop owner tells Kanchan to sit down next to the man. Kanchan is served some tea, toast and an omelette. Some unemployed youths loudly complain about Partition, about living like ghosts and the loss of the magic of “old Kolkata” (to these refugees). The shop owner asks Kanchan for payment, but he has no money. Instead of paying up, he accuses the shop owner of feeding him without him asking for it; then, he makes the gluttonous man his guarantor and gets thrown out with a smack on his backside.

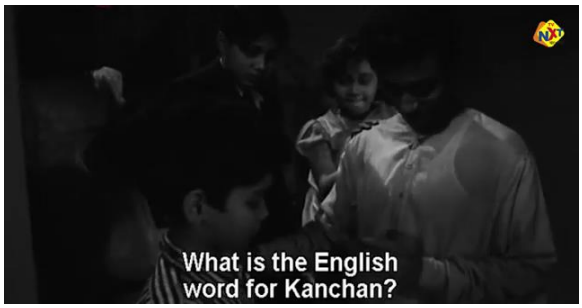


Roaming the city Kanchan meets a traffic police officer who sings in heavily accented Bengali. He then roams around the Howrah shipyard. We see an itinerant singer singing about arriving in the wondrous Kolkata after losing his home. The song describes the city, its buildings, public transport, people, Howrah bridge etc. Horidas goes around looking for Kanchan and finally finds him. A procession goes by, chanting “Inqlab Zindabad” (“Long Live the Revolution”). Kanchan slips away into a rich man’s wedding celebrations.





Crashing a wedding He peeks through the window to see the very pretty girl bride. While he’s sitting inside the palatial house, a boy dressed in a suit asks him who he is and he answers confidently in English. Then Mini, a little girl, asks him to spell MAINTAIN, which he can’t. Kanchan asks her to spell SURPANAKHA [the name of a demon in the Rama story] in Bengali, which she can’t do either. They call each other silly names. The kid’s older cousin brother, a young man, arrives and tests him in English. They humiliate him and leave, but he’s intrigued by Mini. He goes and eats his fill at the feast and enjoys the musical soiree, then sleeps next to some random old man. Kanchan dreams of taking Mini on a boat back to his house and introducing her to Maa as a mythical Sita-like bride, but is chased away by his angry father.





Child kidnappers The next morning, he talks to a refugee family who are rummaging the trash bins for food and chasing away dogs. He sees a mute boy drawing a wonderful picture on the road with chalk. Later, he approaches the boy (Raja) who says that he can speak but is forced to act mute and is not paid for his labour. Raja's master tries to take away all his money and threatens them with a knife, but they run away. Raja tells Kanchan that the child kidnappers have a city-wide network and it's impossible to escape their clutches. Kanchan imagines them earning a lot of money from their drawings and going abroad. Raja says he has no home and doesn't remember his family. Goons come in a car and grab Raja in the middle of the street.



Meeting strangers Kanchan runs away and meets a woman, who takes him to her hovel and feeds him. Her son, who's about the same age as Kanchan, ran away one day. She lets him rest and tells him that his mother would probably cry herself blind after losing a son like him. Walking around, Kanchan meets an itinerant seller of housewares and wants to buy some for his mother. But the man shoos him away after hearing that he has no money.





A daydream Kanchan daydreams that a very large parcel arrives at his house in Maa's name and his father tries to take it, but the postman (his friend Binod in disguise) doesn't give it to him. Then they all open the parcel to find makeup and clothes, etc. The boy, scratching his fake moustache, says that Kanchan worked, earned money and sent Maa all these presents. His father laments that these are all unnecessary luxuries. Binod's fake moustache slips and his father drives the boy off.



Mini and her loving parents Mini interrupts Kanchan's daydreaming and asks him to come with her. While climbing the stairs, she tells him that her mother is very ill and Kanchan imparts the knowledge that kids should be spanked to make them good adults. Mimi is surprised to hear that, as she and her father are good friends. Mini's mother is sitting on the terrace; she offers him food and a great view of the city. She correctly guesses that he ran away from home and says that she has been sick and hasn't been able to return to her natal village. Just as she almost starts crying about never getting better and dying, Mini and her father come to fetch them. He has brought his wife a book to read. They go downstairs as it was getting chilly. Kanchan tells Mini, "Actually your father has the hidden soul of a mother." Mini's father reads her mother a funny story while Kanchan and Mini eat. He says that everything he does is for their smiles and he'll take them out for a day trip as it is a holiday the next day. Mini invites Kanchan to come along. The father asks where Kanchan's home is; he replies it's across the street. The man is taken aback and says that area is a slum. Flustered, Kanchan lets slip that his father is the headmaster of a high school.





Homesick Mini's mother changes the topic and has her father turn on the radio, which plays a sad song ("Oh my mother, don't try to call me back"). Kanchan watches the happy family. Back at the village, Maa cradles his favourite book despondently and searches for him by the riverside. Remembering her, Kanchan starts crying and runs away. Mini runs behind him, asks why he's crying and tells him to return early the next morning. At night, Kanchan roams about in the market area and browses some stores, then sleeps on a park bench.



The next morning When he wakes up, some men are hitting an old woman and the police take her away. Horidas finds him crying. He asks why there is so much pain in the city. Horidas tells Kanchan a story about migrating birds. They find Mini at home and Horidas again sings his song about his famous *bulbul bhaja*. Horidas then leaves Kanchan in Mini's care and promises to meet again in the evening.



A missing person advertisement Mini's father reads a notice in the newspaper from Kanchan's father and decides to keep the boy with them. Mini's mother, who's feeling better, begs her husband to move back to her natal village with Mini after she dies. Mini and Kanchan discuss running away on a ship. Horidas joins them. Kanchan is annoyed that they don't believe that he can earn money in Kolkata and runs away from them. Mini's mother collapses.





A rough day Kanchan sleeps in front of a building at night and his shoes get stolen. A man he meets says that the city is full of thieves. The man says he should clean discarded coal from the coal yard and sell it. Two men come and beat him up and drag him away. They tell him it's their area and he can go and beg for a living. A dead crow rots on the street.



Kindness of strangers Kanchan, now blackened with coal, browses book stores. Then he runs behind a fire engine and reaches a different part of the city. A labourer on the street feeds him. He tells Kanchan, "You've got to tolerate a lot here. In this place, whether you feel angry or try to live with pride or cry, there is no one to look after you. This place is meant for struggle." He advises him to go home. He jumps on a tram and the ticket checker lets him ride without a ticket and even drops him off at the correct stop by Mini's house.



Mini’s family has left the city The door is locked and Horidas is waiting outside. Kanchan cannot find Mini’s mother. Horidas doesn't specify what happened to Mini’s family but tells Kanchan to return back home as his mother is sick. He gives Kanchan his beard and bag and tells him that those are his earnings in Kolkata.



Returning home Kanchan arrives at his home train station and is greeted by the servant. They take a boat and Kanchan enjoys the ride. He says there has been so much commotion since he went missing and his mother almost went mad. Maa and his father wait for them to arrive. Baba says he will leave for a bit lest Kanchan get scared. He must have struggled and gone without eating, he says. Finally, the boat reaches shore and Maa runs and hugs Kanchan. She’s excited that he’s visited all the tourist places, even though he’s not visited all of them. She holds him and leads him to his father, who hesitatingly asks what he liked the most. Kanchan shouts, “I like my home the most” and hugs him. The last scene shows Kanchan, now dressed up in Horidas’s beard and bag, rowing his favourite stolen boat.





