

RARE PROJECTS, MEMORABILIA PRESERVED IN BEHALA ARCHIVE

A gallery of Uttam Kumar's 'what ifs'

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Calcutta: What if Uttam Kumar had shared the screen with Raj Kapoor?

What if he had made another film with Suchitra Sen?

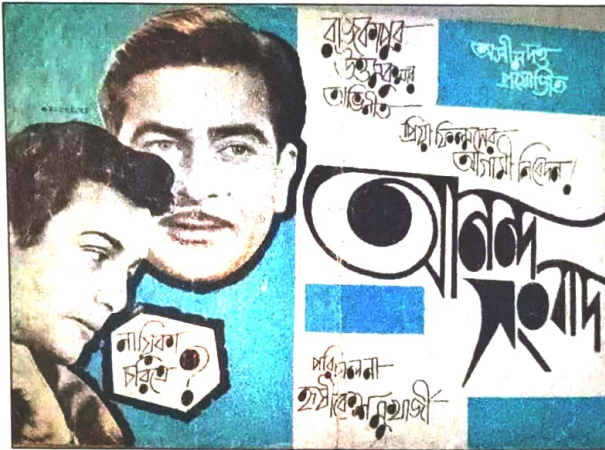
A rare archive in Behala offers a glimpse into these unrealised possibilities.

What makes the collection particularly fascinating is its rare posters and promotional material from films that never made it to the screen. Among them is a poster of HNC Production and director Chitta Basu's *Jabar Belay Pichhu Dake*, reportedly planned with Sandhyarani, Uttam Kumar and Mala Sinha, with a screenplay by Nripenderkrishna Chattopadhyay.

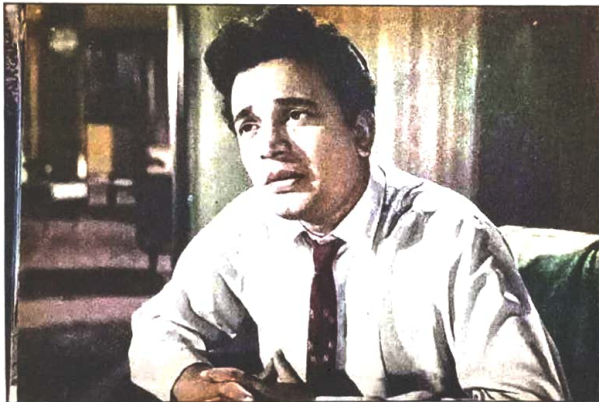
The collection also features posters and material related to *Baro Ghar Ek Uthor*; Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Ananda Sangbad*, which was to bring Uttam Kumar and Raj Kapoor together; Dipak Basu's *Indradhanu*, planned as an Uttam-Suchitra film; and Arabinda Mukherjee's *Sei Phool Photo*, featuring Uttam Kumar, Mithu Mukherjee and Ranjit Mallik.

For Uttam enthusiasts, these unrealised projects open up intriguing possibilities. What might it have been like to see Uttam Kumar and Raj Kapoor together, or another Uttam-Suchitra collaboration that never came to fruition?

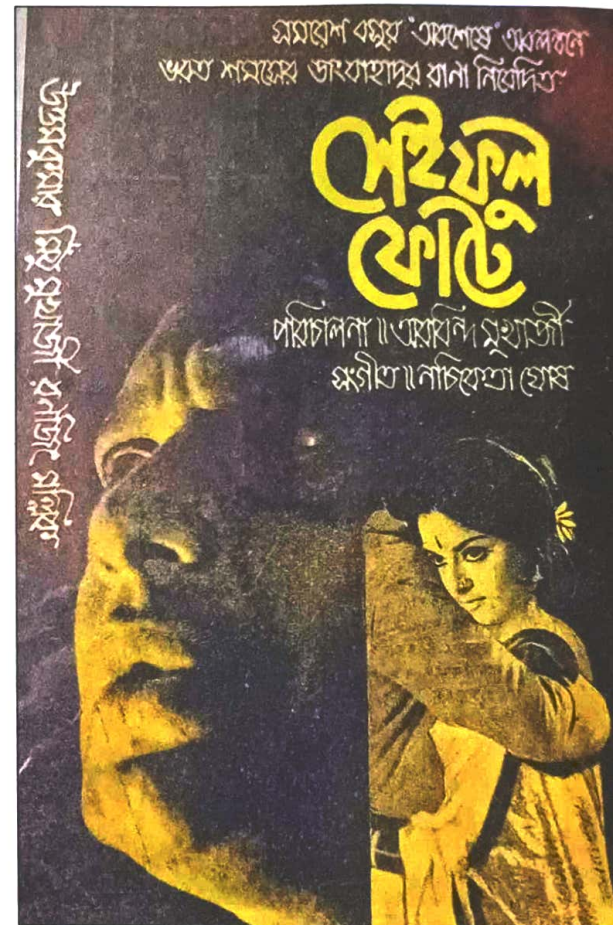
The collection also reveals that films such as *Nyaydanda* and *Haspatal* were initially planned with Uttam Kumar in the lead, opposite Arundhati Devi



A poster of *Ananda Sangbad*, a film that was planned with Uttam Kumar and Raj Kapoor, at the collection in Behala



A still from *Kaal Tumi Aleya* in the collection; (right) a poster of *Sei Phool Photo*, that was supposed to feature Uttam Kumar, Mithu Mukherjee and Ranjit Mallik in lead roles



and Suchitra Sen, respectively. Eventually, however, the films were released with Asitbaran and Ashok Kumar. Such details offer a glimpse into the changing fortunes of Bengali cinema and the many decisions that shaped its history.

Among the rarest items are two advertisements featuring Uttam Kumar during his lifetime, for Aroma Oil and Koley Biscuits. The

archive also preserves five booklets of the celebrated play *Shyamali*, featuring Uttam Kumar, more than 40 lobby cards from his films and nearly 250 film booklets.

"These include materials related to unreleased projects as well as films that were initially expected to feature Uttam Kumar but were eventually made with other actors. The lobby cards, specially produced film

stills once displayed in cinema halls, carry their own nostalgia, recalling an era when a visit to the cinema was an event and the sight of Uttam Kumar's image outside a theatre was enough to create excitement," said Paramananda, 49.

The story behind Paramananda's archive is equally interesting. His connection with Uttam Kumar is rooted in family history,

particularly through his *gyathamoshai* (elder uncle), Satya Chaudhury. Although Paramananda was born in Behala, his parents, uncles and other family members lived in Bhowanipore, near Uttam Kumar's residence, before his birth.

A particularly evocative connection emerged through music.

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A gallery of Uttam's 'what ifs'

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"In 1945, my *jyathamoshai*, Satya Chaudhury, recorded the Puja song *Prithibi Amare Chay, Rekho Na Bendhe Amay*, which became a hit. The song was also one of Uttam Kumar's favourites. A passionate lover of music and a fine singer himself, Uttam would regularly sing at his home with the harmonium," recounted Paramananda, a Behala resident.

On June 1, 1948, when Uttam Kumar married Gauri Devi, he was yet to become the Mahanayak Bengal would later adore. During the wedding celebrations, he sang this very song.

Years later, in 1957, Uttam Kumar appeared opposite Mala Sinha in *Prithibi Amare Chay* and sang a portion of the song in his own voice, creating another memorable link between the song and the actor.

Paramananda himself



Paramananda Chowdhury

grew up in a deeply musical environment.

"My father, Manoranjan Chowdhury, was a freedom fighter and singer whose records were released by HMV. My mother, Rekha Devi, had studied the piano under Louis Banks in Darjeeling and was herself a talented singer. Surrounded by music, cata-



A poster of *Indradhanu*, a proposed Uttam Kumar-Suchitra Sen film, in the collection

logues, posters, booklets and film memorabilia, I gradually developed my own passion for

collecting," he said.

About three years ago, he began to realise that his remarkable collection needed to be preserved for posterity. As Uttam Kumar's centenary approached, the idea of creating an archive gradually took shape.

"My objective was to safeguard rare booklets, lobby cards, photographic stills, advertisements and other memorabilia from the passage of time," said Paramananda.

The result is more than a personal collection. In a small room in Behala survives an alternative history of Uttam Kumar and, in many ways, of Bengali cinema itself. It is a reminder that while centenary celebrations may eventually end, Uttam nostalgia endures. For Bengal, Uttam Kumar is not merely a memory of cinema; he remains an emotion preserved across generations.