



An Analysis of Ritwik Ghatak's *Bari Theke Paliye* From the Perspective of Exile, Childhood, and Architecture

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Abstract: This article examines Ritwik Ghatak's *Bari Theke Paliye* (1959) through childhood, displacement, and the built environment. Through qualitative close analysis of domestic interiors, streets, bridges, and encounters, it asks how a child's changing sense of place reveals urban inequality. Kanchan's voluntary flight from his village differs from Partition-era forced migration, yet his encounters with displaced adults connect the journey to histories of lost livelihoods and belonging. The film contrasts the city's promise of freedom with precarious work, anonymity, and collective violence. Architecture emerges as an active force that can discipline, shelter, exclude, or enable connection; home and city remain ambivalent rather than fixed opposites.

Keywords: Ritwik Ghatak; *Bari Theke Paliye*; childhood; urban space; displacement; architecture; Partition; Kolkata; Bengali cinema



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Introduction

Exile and displacement are commonly discussed in terms of migration, political upheaval, and the loss of a homeland. Yet they also transform people's relationships with ordinary places: homes, streets, schools, workplaces, and the routes through which everyday life becomes familiar. Spatial belonging develops through repeated encounters and accumulated memories, not simply through residence at a geographical location. For children, these environments provide opportunities for play, movement, social connection, and an emerging sense of security. Their disruption can therefore alter not only where children live but also how they understand and navigate the world.

Attending to childhood and architecture adds a necessary spatial dimension to accounts of displacement. Shelter is indispensable, but a dwelling's organization, privacy, accessibility, and opportunities for independent movement also shape children's experience. The present article considers how domestic interiors, public streets, and monumental infrastructure become meaningful through a child's position within them. It distinguishes historical exile from the more metaphorical sense of estrangement produced when a familiar environment no longer feels habitable.

This study uses qualitative, scene-based textual analysis. Descriptive analysis attends to narrative context and observable formal choices before relating them to broader questions of childhood and space (Berg & Lune, 2012; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). *Bari Theke Paliye* (Ghatak, 1959) was selected because its child-centered journey through Kolkata connects domestic authority, urban spectacle, and encounters with people displaced by Partition. The analysis focuses on the family home, Kanchan's arrival at Howrah Bridge, his relationship with the street vendor Haridas, his observation of crowd violence, and his return home. Each sequence is considered in terms of spatial composition, scale,

camera position and movement, black-and-white tonal contrast, sound, and characterization. These selected sequences are illustrative rather than an exhaustive sample; the interpretation does not claim to establish the director's intentions. The central question is how Ghatak's filmmaking transforms a child's experience of movement into a critical encounter with the social organization of urban space.

Ghatak's cinema repeatedly returns to displacement, class decline, and damaged forms of belonging in the wake of Bengal's Partition. *Bari Theke Paliye* (1959), however, does not depict Kanchan as a Partition refugee. Instead, it follows a boy who leaves his rural home and discovers the attractions and dangers of Kolkata. His encounters reveal how experiences of insecurity, poverty, and exile can coexist in the same city without being interchangeable. Architecture and urban space shape these encounters: the bridge promises connection, the street offers both livelihood and danger, and the domestic interior is at once protective and constraining (Dass, 2017; Guha, 2025). Figure 1 identifies the film under discussion.



Figure 1. Poster for *Bari Theke Paliye* (1959).

Exile, Childhood, and the Built Environment

A useful distinction is between space as an arrangement of physical objects and space as an outcome of social relations. Lefebvre (1974/1991) understands social space as produced through practices, representations, and lived experience. In this reading, an architectural form acquires its meaning through the activities and unequal relations that take place within it. The bridge does not

necessarily create belonging merely because it connects two riverbanks; likewise, a house does not guarantee safety because it provides shelter. This perspective offers a way to connect Ghatak's formal contrasts of scale and movement with the changing rights and vulnerabilities of the people who inhabit the city.

The distinction also connects with de Certeau's (1980/1984) discussion of walking as an everyday spatial practice. Kanchan learns Kolkata not through a planned map of monuments but through improvised routes, stops, and encounters. His movement briefly opens possibilities that the architectural city appears to promise, yet the freedom to wander is unevenly distributed. For Haridas, public space is less an adventure than a place where income must be earned and a displaced identity negotiated. Reading these trajectories together prevents the child's temporary estrangement from being equated with the economic and historical dispossession experienced by refugees. It also keeps childhood agency in view without romanticizing vulnerability.

Displacement involves a rupture in the relationships through which a person inhabits a place. It may be caused by forced migration, but its consequences extend beyond the physical act of moving: familiar routes, social networks, routines, and possibilities for participation may also be lost (Özçetin & Rottmann, 2022). Built environments are therefore not neutral containers. The same street, home, or institution may offer security to one person while restricting access or intensifying vulnerability for another. Exile and displacement are not identical concepts, but both draw attention to the connections between space, memory, and social belonging.

Children encounter place through bodily movement, sensory detail, habitual journeys, and relationships with others. A home, classroom, playground, or street can become a point of orientation through its surfaces, sounds, rules, and recurring activities. The loss or disruption of these surroundings may unsettle children's expectations of safety and continuity, even when a change of location appears materially beneficial.

Daily routes such as home, school, neighborhood, playground, and street constitute the basic coordinates by which a child makes sense of the world. The integrity of these coordinates is shattered by forced migration and displacement. It is an incomplete approach to assume that children's vulnerability stems solely from pre-migration events such as war, loss, or violence. The insecure situation after migration, housing anxiety, constant displacement, poor adaptation conditions, loss of privacy, and irregular lifestyles also significantly affect children's psychological well-being (Cayabyab et al., 2020).

The question of where to live is as vital for a displaced child as the question of what they are experiencing. The necessity of living in enclosed spaces within large, densely populated refugee communities, combined with a lack of family support, exacerbates long-term stress symptoms (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1998). Safety, the quality of play areas, privacy, contact with nature, opportunities for social interaction, and the adaptability of the environment are extremely important for the physical and psychological health of children (Çakmakçı & Yıldız, 2022; Chen et al., 2021; Parviainen et al., 2022; Sinha, 2023; Veronese et al., 2020).

The reciprocal relationship between childhood and space is both functional and perceptual. Unclear, temporary, or poorly designed environments make it difficult for children to understand and navigate space, leading to orientation problems and difficulties in forming a sense of belonging (Seyhan & Bülbül Arıoğlu, 2025). As Pakih (2026) emphasizes, the spatial environment plays a critical role in children's cognitive development.

In conditions of displacement and refugee status, play is often seen as a non-urgent need, relegated to the background of other issues. Yet, playgrounds and opportunities for free movement are not luxuries for children; they are fundamental needs for all children. According to Sinha (2023), providing children with high-quality spaces in a good city is not enough; providing them only with security is also insufficient. This urban environment should encourage independent movement, exploration,

connection with nature, and create a sense of belonging in children. An environment where a child can move independently, find their own way, stop and play, and interact with others strengthens their autonomy, personality, and development.

Children, particularly in challenging circumstances, have the capacity to transform their living spaces and create new uses for them. Studies on spatial autonomy in children over the past decade have shown that they strive to protect their psychological health and create their own living spaces in oppressive environments (Veronese et al., 2020). These findings enable us to avoid viewing childhood solely through the lens of victimization in the context of exile, displacement, and refugee experiences, and to also see the creative and resilient relationships children build with their environment. In this context, children's spatial experience is multifaceted. Child development benefits not just from running and playing in open spaces, but also from safe repetitions, familiar relationships, and daily rhythms (Parviainen et al., 2022; Sampson & Gifford, 2010).

Sanyal's (2009) research on refugee settlements in Kolkata indicates that the experiences of displacement, occupation, and settlement are not solely characterized by victimization. In addition, they encompass active spatial claims and constructive interactions with the environment. This perspective demonstrates that architecture is not merely a matter of designed arrangements; it is also shaped by the daily interventions of particularly vulnerable groups.

Displacement, Cinema, and Urban Space

Films can make displacement visible through their treatment of ordinary spaces: homes left behind, crowded streets, stations, borders, temporary shelters, and places appropriated for survival. Such settings do more than establish location. Framing, movement, sound, and the relative scale of people and buildings can reveal unequal access to security, mobility, and recognition. The cinematic city is therefore not simply a collection of architectural forms but a contested field of encounters, memories, and material constraints.

The Partition of British India in 1947 produced mass displacement and lasting changes to Bengal's social and urban life (Sarkar, 2009; Sen, 2018). Refugee settlement, housing insecurity, and class transformation formed part of Kolkata's post-Partition landscape (Burman, 2022). Ghatak's films repeatedly return to these conditions through damaged families, disrupted livelihoods, and the longing for lost places. Cinematic attention to everyday experience can disclose aspects of historical upheaval that exceed an account organized solely around political events. In Ghatak's work, the home is often both a remembered place of attachment and a site of instability; the city may promise opportunity while reproducing exclusion. The films' lighting, sound, and spatial arrangements help make these contradictions perceptible (Banerjee, 2023; Raychaudhuri, 2009).

In Ghatak's cinema, space actively highlights social contradictions rather than just serving as a backdrop for events (Dass, 2017). In his films, the street, wall, bridge, house, station, sidewalk, or neighborhood is frequently considered alongside psychological states and their social contexts. Scenes depicting city life are generally portrayed as heterogeneous, fragmented, conflicting, and dynamic. The stark contrast between monumental buildings and the lower-class lives they disregard reveals the complex nature of these cities.

Bari Theke Paliye approaches these concerns obliquely, through a child who travels rather than a refugee who is forcibly expelled. Kanchan's journey should not be equated with the historical experiences of those displaced by Partition. Its significance lies instead in the relationships it makes possible: the boy encounters adults, particularly Haridas, whose interrupted lives disclose the uneven consequences of national division. The film thereby places childhood mobility and historical displacement in dialogue while preserving the difference between them.

Childhood, Exile, and Architecture in *Bari Theke Paliye*

Bari Theke Paliye (1959) places a child's encounters with space at the center of its narrative. Kanchan leaves a rural household governed by paternal authority and enters the unfamiliar social world

of Kolkata. What initially resembles an adventurous journey gradually becomes an education in urban inequality. His small body, shifting gaze, and uncertain movement provide a vantage point from which the scale and contradictions of modern city life can be examined.

In the film's opening scene, Kanchan appears in his family home in the village (Figure 2). The family environment he finds himself in is presented to the viewer as a space of oppression from his perspective. In terms of plot, Kanchan is a mischievous, imaginative, and energetic child. He perceives his father as a harsh, punitive, and almost fairytale-like figure of evil. Kanchan's view of his father as a cruel devil who imprisons and oppresses his mother is important for understanding the film's oscillating gaze between reality and childhood fantasy.

In terms of framing, the village house is not presented as a spacious and liberating pastoral space, but rather as a space of strict family authority in the child's mind. The camera often positions Kanchan in motion, at doorways, moving between the interior and exterior of the house. This movement demonstrates the instability of the child's relationship with the home: it is both his birthplace and a boundary to be escaped from. In terms of camera angles, the father figure's presence in the child's eyes is significant. Even though the father is not shown directly in an exaggerated low-angle shot, he is magnified as an authority figure in the child's perception.



Figure 2. Kanchan in the family home in *Bari Theke Paliye* (1959).

In the mise-en-scène, objects within the home, books, and everyday family life are significant. On Kanchan's reading table in the village house, the book *El Dorado* is visible. This detail gives material form to the film's desire for escape. *El Dorado*, in the child's imagination, is a place of wealth, adventure, and freedom; however, as the film progresses, the disillusionment of the big city will frustrate him. The lighting and black-and-white visuals establish the village house not as absolute darkness or a romantically bright space, but as a space interwoven with everyday poverty. Here, the visual world does not detach from reality, even in the child's fantasy. The use of sound is crucial in establishing paternal authority. The father's voice circulates within the house like a rhythm of commands, threats, or discipline. The contrast between Kanchan's moving body and the father's authoritarian voice forms the film's first conflict. In the acting, the child actor's energy, curiosity, and restlessness drive the scene; the father's acting oscillates between harshness and the tension of poverty.

Although the home is often associated with security and belonging, the film first presents it to Kanchan as a place of discipline. His father's authority shapes the boy's experience of the domestic interior, while doorways register his desire to move beyond it. Adventure and resistance are not mutually exclusive motives: the allure of another world helps Kanchan imagine an escape from a

household he finds restrictive. His departure is voluntary and should not be described as forced exile. Nevertheless, the film uses this movement to explore how an apparently familiar place may become difficult to inhabit. The village is not reduced to oppression alone; its routines and social familiarity will later acquire a different meaning in contrast with the city.

Kanchan's journey to Kolkata is a turning point in the film. The escape from the village to the city signifies a radical change in life and in the environment that sustains it, as well as an expansion of space. The scene in which Kanchan observes Kolkata from the Howrah Bridge upon arriving in the city reveals the film's urban cinematic quality. Guha (2025), drawing on this scene, states that the film constructs Kolkata like a collage seen through the eyes of a small child. This collage logic allows the city to be presented not as a single whole, but as a collection of fragments, encounters, sounds, faces, signs, and movements. For Kanchan, the city is initially enchanting; however, this enchantment will soon be mixed with anonymity and harsh reality. In terms of framing, the Howrah Bridge reveals the impact of the large-scale modern urban structure on the child's body. The contrast between Kanchan's small body and the bridge's enormous structure makes the child's vulnerability to the city visible (Figure 3). Wide shots capture the city's vastness; medium and close-ups capture Kanchan's curiosity, astonishment, and alienation. This contrast is fundamental to the film's visual logic: the city is large, the child is small; but because the film constructs the world through the child's eyes, the child remains the center of perception. The camera movement becomes dynamic in harmony with pedestrian and vehicular traffic, and with crowds on the bridge. With the camera's 360-degree panning, the bridge appears not as a static monument but as a flowing life machine. This creates the modern rhythm of the city. Ghatak's city is not a postcard image; it is a constantly moving organism, bringing people together, sometimes uniting them, sometimes swallowing them. The lighting creates stark contrasts between the modern city, the bridge's metallic surfaces, the crowd, and the open sky. The black-and-white image makes the bridge both real and symbolic. In the acting, Kanchan's gaze is prominent: he

perceives the bridge not as a technical structure, but as a magical space of passage. The audience sees the city through his astonishment.

Kolkata, which stands out as India's Cultural Capital, is a large city but also harbors great contradictions (Abbasuddin & Alfarid Hussain, 2026). The scene that illustrates this situation summarizes the film's urban philosophy: Kolkata is a place that both connects and disconnects, fascinates and frightens, and is both modern and intertwined with folk culture. Kanchan's adventure is no longer just a personal escape, but an encounter with the multifaceted reality of the city. Spaces define the boundaries and transitions between societies, while places convey meanings and messages to individuals and cultures (Kurtulmus & Yıldız, 2025). From this perspective, colonial-era structures do not serve as places for Kanchan because they hold no meaning. The city Kanchan explores is not one focused on symbolic structures marked as must-sees on a tourist map. Kanchan does not experience the city like an adult following a planned route. Instead, he wanders randomly around the city, gets lost, stops, and redirects himself. The urban experience is constructed through bodily knowledge rather than spatial knowledge.



Figure 3. The spatial contrast between the child and Howrah Bridge in Bari Theke Paliye (1959).

In one of the later scenes, a Baul singer walks across the Howrah Bridge, singing a song expressing his desire for a bridge that could connect people (Figure 4). This detail demonstrates that Ghatak goes beyond using urban space as an architectural structure, employing it as an ethical and social metaphor. The bridge physically connects the two banks; however, the Baul figure's wish is for people to be connected spiritually and socially as well. In the scene, the Baul singer embodies the contrast and transition between modern bridges and folk culture. On one side are steel, traffic, and the modern city; on the other, the mystical folk music tradition. Based on Hutnyk's (2023) observation that folk styles and the aesthetics of political solidarity are an important vein in Bengali new wave cinema, Ghatak's relationship with folk culture can also be considered in this context. While the Howrah Bridge, an example of colonial-era engineering, connects two shores, the film conveys that this physical link does not eliminate social and spiritual separations. Through individuals' experiences, space transforms, gains meaning, and acquires a sense of place (Hacıoğlu, 2025). This bridge, while establishing transportation links, does not create a sense of meaning and belonging for people. The roads that were opened and the bridges that were built fail to close the cracks in social life, thus embodying the contradiction of modernity.



Figure 4. A Baul singer beneath Howrah Bridge in *Bari Theke Paliye* (1959).

Kanchan's encounter with Haridas, the singing chanachur vendor, is one of the film's emotional centers (Figure 5). Haridas is the figure who offers the child a sense of human connection amid the anonymity of the city. Therefore, the scene demonstrates that Kolkata is harsh, crowded, and threatening, yet it can also foster unexpected solidarity. In practical terms, Kanchan is alone and inexperienced in the city. Haridas, on the other hand, is a laborer existing within the street economy, making a living through his voice, body, and performance. Chanachur vending is not merely commerce; it is a performative act constructed with rhythm, song, gesture, and sound. Haridas's singing blends into the city's auditory fabric. This character demonstrates how Ghatak makes visible the relationship between folk culture, street performance, and everyday labor. In terms of framing, the shots of Haridas and Kanchan together show the child forming a network of relationships for the first time in the city. Kanchan is prone to getting lost in the frame alone; the dual compositions with Haridas create a temporary sense of security. Haridas's body, voice, and vendor's stall and objects make the city legible for Kanchan. The city is no longer just massive bridges and crowds, but a space of people with faces. The camera movement accompanies Haridas's performative energy. The vendor's walk, song, and interactions with customers give the scene rhythm. The sale of chanachur in the stage setting makes the lower strata of the city's economy visible. Haridas is not rich; he does not have a secure position, but he has learned to exist in the city. What he offers Kanchan is not just food or friendship, but survival skills. This knowledge shatters the child's El Dorado fantasy. Living in the city is not just about wandering and seeing; it is about finding food, distinguishing people, not getting lost in the crowd, and making one's voice heard.

The lighting and use of space emphasize the reality of the street. The open air, the crowds, the movement, the vendors, and the sense of transience define Haridas's life. There is no indoor security; the street is a workplace, a stage, and a struggle for shelter. In Ghatak, the city serves as a backdrop for both historical trauma and daily survival strategies (Chowdhury, 2015). In terms of acting, Kali Banerjee's interpretation of Haridas imbues the character with warmth, humor, and fragility. Haridas

is not a melodramatic savior; he is too poor. However, his approach to Kanchan creates an ethical connection within the anonymity of the city. Kanchan's acting is more receptive in this scene: he wonders, observes, and learns. The child establishes his first real connection with the city through Haridas. Sound design is the fundamental carrier of the scene. Haridas's song is an advertisement, an identity, and a way of establishing relationships. In the city, sound provides visibility. Haridas is noticed for his singing; Kanchan finds a foothold in the city through his voice. Therefore, the scene highlights the role of sound in Ghatak's early cinema: sound creates atmosphere and is essential for survival.

The character of Haridas, whom Kanchan encounters on the streets, is the figure who most intensely reflects the film's themes of exile and displacement. Haridas was formerly a teacher but was forced to leave his home because of the Partition of Bengal. After ten years of searching for work in Kolkata's chaotic social and economic structure, he began selling goods on the streets (Vahali, 2018). Through the director's use of the Haridas character, we understand that exile is not just the loss of a home, but also the loss of social class, professional identity, and public respect. Haridas's struggle to exist in the city shows that the modern city cannot be equal for everyone. For Haridas and those like him, the city is not a space of opportunity, but a necessary performance space for survival. To achieve this, they must constantly be visible, make noise, attract attention, and wear a mask. For Haridas, existing in the city means becoming someone else by wearing a mask. This clearly symbolizes the erosion of identity in the postcolonial metropolis.



Figure 5. Kanchan encounters the street vendor Haridas in Bari Theke Paliye (1959).

The scene where a woman accused of kidnapping a child is beaten is one of the harshest urban encounters in *Bari Theke Paliye*, abruptly interrupting the adventurous tone established through the child's perspective. This brutal incident reveals Ghatak's unwavering commitment to depicting Kolkata's ugly face, showcasing the crowd's violence and the violence embedded in everyday urban life (Figure 6). This event demonstrates that the city is not a magical, colorful, and pluralistic space for encounters; rather, it is a place interwoven with rumor, fear, crowd psychology, and violence. On a narrative level, the scene depicts a woman, implied to be innocent, becoming the target of a crowd in a panic over a child kidnapping. For Kanchan, this experience is shocking because he is a lonely and vulnerable child in the city. The violence directed at the woman indirectly conveys the danger Kanchan himself faces. Running away from home initially seemed like freedom; however, in the city, freedom is intertwined with vulnerability. The child has escaped the authority of his father, but now he encounters a more amorphous, more unpredictable, and more ruthless authority: the violence of the crowd. In terms of framing, crowded scenes are crucial. The woman ceases to be a singular figure within the frame and becomes a body trapped within the crowd. When the camera shows the crowd in a wide shot, the anonymity of the violence is highlighted: the perpetrators are not individuals, but the collective body of the city, organized by fear. Close-ups amplify the woman's fear, Kanchan's bewilderment, and the viewer's ethical unease. In this scene, the child's gaze functions as a moral filter

for the viewer. While adults normalize violence, the child's gaze makes it incomprehensible and terrifying.

The camera angles, especially when approaching Kanchan's eye level, increase the horror of the scene. The crowd of adult bodies can feel like a wall closing in on the child. This visual arrangement points to the child character's problem of scale within the city: Kanchan is both physically small and socially vulnerable. Ghatak uses this smallness in his camerawork not for melodramatic pity but to show the city's structural violence. There is no formal law; there is only rumor, accusation, and crowd judgment. In previous scenes, the street was Haridas's performance space, Madari's stage for the spectacle, and the Baul singer's transitional space. Here, however, the street is a place of lynching. Thus, Ghatak shows that the city lacks a single meaning: the same pavement can be a space for livelihood, play, spectacle, and violence.



Figure 6. *The crowded city becomes a setting for accusation and violence in Bari Theke Paliye (1959).*

The lighting and black-and-white imagery enhance the scene's harshness. Shadows, the overlapping of bodies, rapid movements, and tension on faces create a documentary sense of urgency. The editing also supports the scene's chaotic structure: the crowd, the woman, Kanchan's gaze, the shouts, and the cuts between movements reduce the viewer's sense of safety. Sound design is crucial in this scene. Shouts, accusations, the roar of the crowd, the woman's scream, and street noise overlap. The city's plural voice produces violence, not solidarity. Bhattacharya's (2021) emphasis on sound

being central to formal and ideological strategies in Indian art cinema also applies to this scene. Sound creates the event's atmosphere and reflects the crowd's moral decline. From an acting perspective, the woman's panic, the crowd's aggression, and Kanchan's freezing are the three emotional axes of the scene. Kanchan is not active here; he is a witness. This witnessing is a new stage in his urban education. The city is no longer just an El Dorado to be explored; it is a place where someone accused without evidence can be harmed, where rumor overrides truth, and where people can easily become enemies of one another. The scene severely shatters the child's fairytale image of the city.

Read through these distinctions, the street offers neither freedom nor danger in isolation. It is produced through practices that include commerce, performance, temporary care, surveillance, and violence (de Certeau, 1980/1984; Lefebvre, 1974/1991). Kanchan's wandering exposes him to each of these uses without giving him control over them. The film's ethical pressure comes from showing how a child can learn to read the city even as he remains dependent on the decisions and actions of adults.

Streets are emphasized as the most important spatial elements in the film. The street serves as both a transit area in the transportation network and a child's first introduction to the complex social world. Kanchan learns by playing in the streets, is surprised, frightened, and shaken as he observes everyday city life. The street, full of dynamic and unexpected things, shows him not the official face of the modern city, but its everyday, unequal, and insecure face. In the film, poverty, homelessness, begging, unemployment, and exclusion become commonplace, visible on the street as fundamental elements of the everyday life of people confronting insecurity after displacement. The street clearly becomes a point of intersection between exile and architecture. The street chronotope functions as the main space where displaced, class-losing, or excluded individuals gather in Ghatak's cinema (Vahali, 2018). In *Bari Theke Paliye* (1959), the street becomes the material surface of homelessness and social collapse. The pavement is no longer just a public circulation space. Those pavements, walked upon in everyday city life, become a bed, a bench, a waiting area, and essentially a survival space for some individuals.

Kanchan's return home brings him back into contact with his mother and the familiar domestic environment (Figure 7). It is not merely the resolution of a cautionary tale about a disobedient child. His encounters with labor, hospitality, uncertainty, and violence in the city have altered his understanding of security. The film invites viewers to read the homecoming as an act of reassessment rather than simply as defeat or repentance. The house has not changed, but Kanchan's experience of the world beyond it has changed the terms on which he perceives it.



Figure 7. Kanchan returns to his mother in *Bari Theke Paliye* (1959).

The film's framing of Kanchan and his mother emphasizes their renewed proximity. In contrast with the beginning, the domestic space now offers the possibility of recognition and care. Yet the return does not erase the insecurity he has witnessed in Kolkata. The emotional force of the scene derives from this asymmetry: home becomes legible anew for Kanchan, while the broader social conditions disclosed during his journey remain unresolved.

The lighting upon returning home is softer than the earlier oppressive atmosphere; however, this softening should not be read as a nostalgic peace. Ghatak neither completely sanctifies nor completely rejects the idea of home. In Ghatak's work, home is the fundamental space that is lost, sought after, sometimes oppressive, but whose absence creates an even greater wound (Vahali, 2018). In terms of

sound, the return home signifies a transition from the city's noise to more familiar domestic sounds. However, this familiarity is no longer heard as it was. Kanchan's ear carries Haridas's song, the calls of street vendors, the hum of the crowd, and the sounds of violence. Therefore, even the sound of home is overshadowed by the city experience. In the acting, the weariness and calmness on Kanchan's face show his inner transformation. The mother, on the other hand, speaks from a more everyday, innocent place because she does not fully understand the child's experience.

By the end of the film, Kanchan's sense of home has become more complex. What initially appeared mainly as a site of authority can also be recognized as a place of attachment and relative safety. Conversely, the city, first imagined as an open field of adventure, proves capable of both generosity and violence. Ghatak resists treating either environment as wholly liberating or wholly oppressive; their meanings shift with the child's changing experience.

Conclusion

Bari Theke Paliye (1959) uses a child's movement between village and city to illuminate the relationship between spatial experience and social inequality. The analysis has shown that the film does not recount Kanchan's forced exile. Rather, it juxtaposes his voluntary departure with the histories of people displaced or impoverished by Partition. This distinction matters: Kanchan can eventually return home, whereas Haridas's history makes such restoration far less certain.

The child's perspective gives the film its critical force. Kanchan experiences the city through movement, scale, sound, curiosity, and fear rather than through an adult's established categories. The monumental bridge initially invites wonder; the street then reveals the labor required to survive, the possibility of unexpected care, and the threat of collective violence. These encounters complicate conventional representations of childhood as passive innocence (Kurian & Navaneeth, 2025). Ghatak's attention to the boy's changing bodily relation to space makes the social contradictions of the city palpable without relying solely on explanatory dialogue.

The film also demonstrates that shelter, safety, and belonging do not necessarily coincide. A family home may provide physical protection while restricting autonomy; a public street may enable connection while exposing a child to unpredictable danger. By making these contradictions visible, Ghatak suggests that architecture cannot be understood only through building types or urban design. The social relations taking place within and between those structures are essential to their meaning.

Kanchan's experience unsettles the hierarchy between monumental infrastructure and everyday places. Howrah Bridge signifies the technological scale of the modern city, yet the boy's most consequential education occurs in streets, informal markets, and interpersonal encounters. The city's social history emerges not only through official structures but also through the people who work, move, and seek shelter around them.

The film therefore treats architecture as more than a backdrop. Framing and spatial contrast bring the city's inequalities into view, challenging any simple identification of urban modernization with increased freedom. The village and the city each combine enabling and restrictive conditions. Ghatak's achievement lies in presenting these spaces as lived and contested environments whose significance changes with the viewer's proximity to Kanchan.

This reading contributes to studies of cinema, childhood, and the built environment by showing how a fictional child's changing experience of place can illuminate historically situated forms of exclusion. Its claims are interpretive and specific to the scenes examined; they do not substitute for empirical research on refugee children or urban planning. Nevertheless, *Bari Theke Paliye* offers a valuable cinematic reminder that the ethical dimensions of architecture include access, care, mobility, and the possibility of belonging.

Editor's note: Additional scholarship

In addition to the scholarship already discussed, several essays in this issue of CINEJ address exile, place, and memory in Ghatak's Partition-era cinema: Francis (2026) on history, affect,

and memory in *Subarnarekha*; Trivedi (2026) on caste, exile, and postcolonial betrayal in the same film; and Erdem (2026) on the Partition Trilogy. O'Donnell (2004) examines how Ghatak's films construct "homeland," which bears on this article's reading of home as both attachment and constraint. These sources have been included where directly relevant; the interpretive claims remain those of the author.

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