

# People's Theatre

A TALK BY TRINA NILEENA BANERJEE

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF THEATRE CRITICS, NOVI SAD

A model of the stage in “*Nabanna*” (first produced by the IPTA on 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1944 at Srirangam Theatre, Calcutta). Housed at the Natya Shodh Sansthan. Created by Sri Khaled Chowdhury.



The IPTA Logo.  
The Natya Shodh Archives.

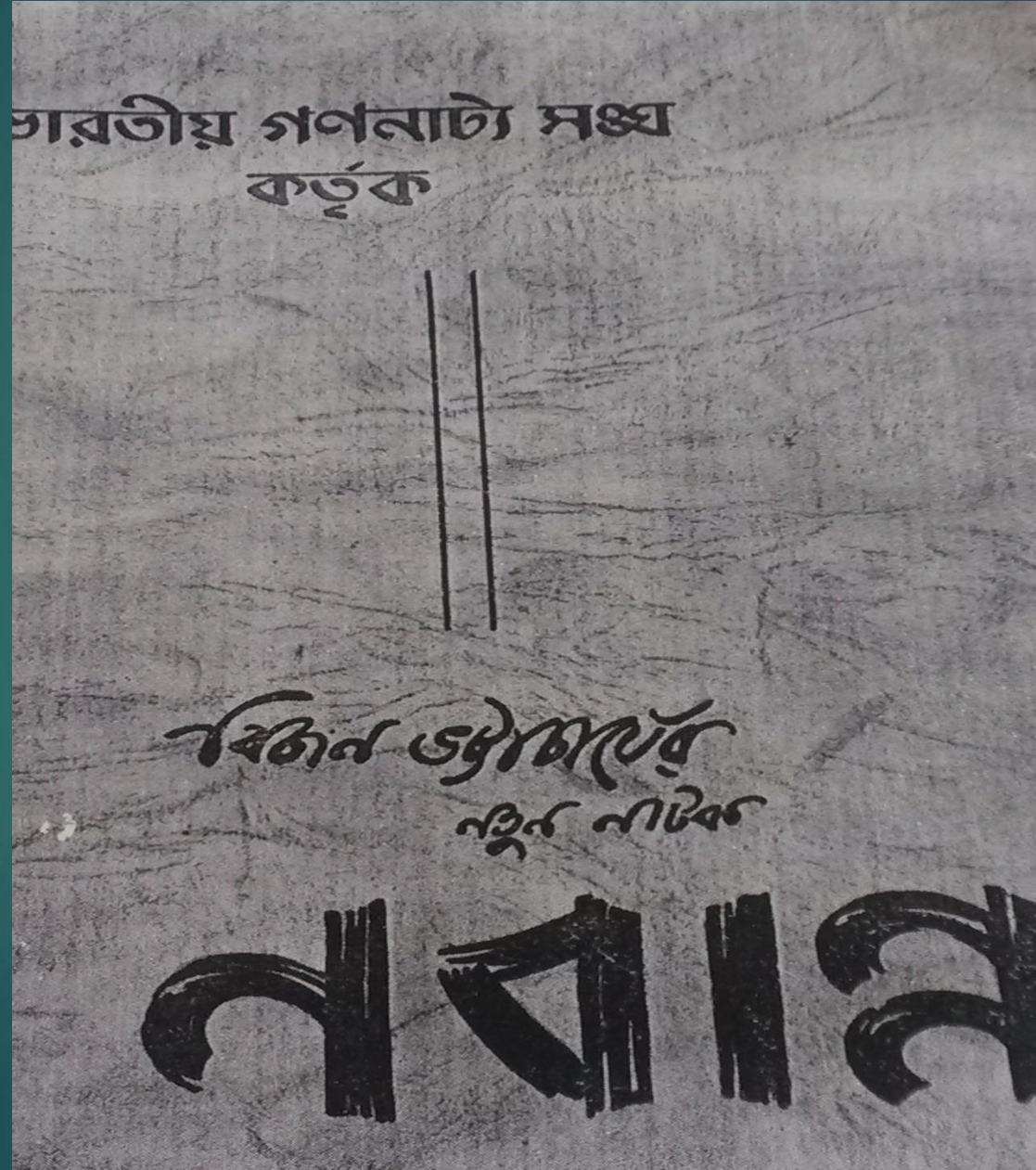




विश्व युद्ध की शक्तों के बीच की लड़ाई



Cover of First Edition, Purabi Publishers (Calcutta), 1944.



# নবান্ন প্রযোজনায়

পরিচালনা—শম্ভু মিত্র ও বিজ্ঞান ভট্টাচার্য

উপদেষ্টা—মনোরঞ্জন ভট্টাচার্য

আবহ সংগীত পরিচালক—গৌর ঘোষ

সহযোগিতা করছেন—সুজিৎ নাথ

অধেন্দু ঘোষ

বিজয় দে

ক্ষীরোদ গাঙ্গুলি

শৈলেন দাস

চণ্ডী ঘোষ

কমল মিত্র

সুশীল বিশ্বাস

বরদা গুপ্ত

সুনীল গুপ্ত

শান্তি মিত্র

ননীগোপাল চৌধুরী

লক্ষণ দাশ

মঞ্চাধ্যক্ষ—চিত্ত ব্যানার্জি

সহযোগী—অরুণ দাশগুপ্ত

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## ভারতীয় গণনাট্য সঙ্ঘ

( ফ্যাশিষ্টবিরোধী লেখক ও শিল্পী সঙ্ঘের নাট্য-বিভাগ )

৪৬, ধর্মতলা স্ট্রীট, কলকাতা

সভাপতি

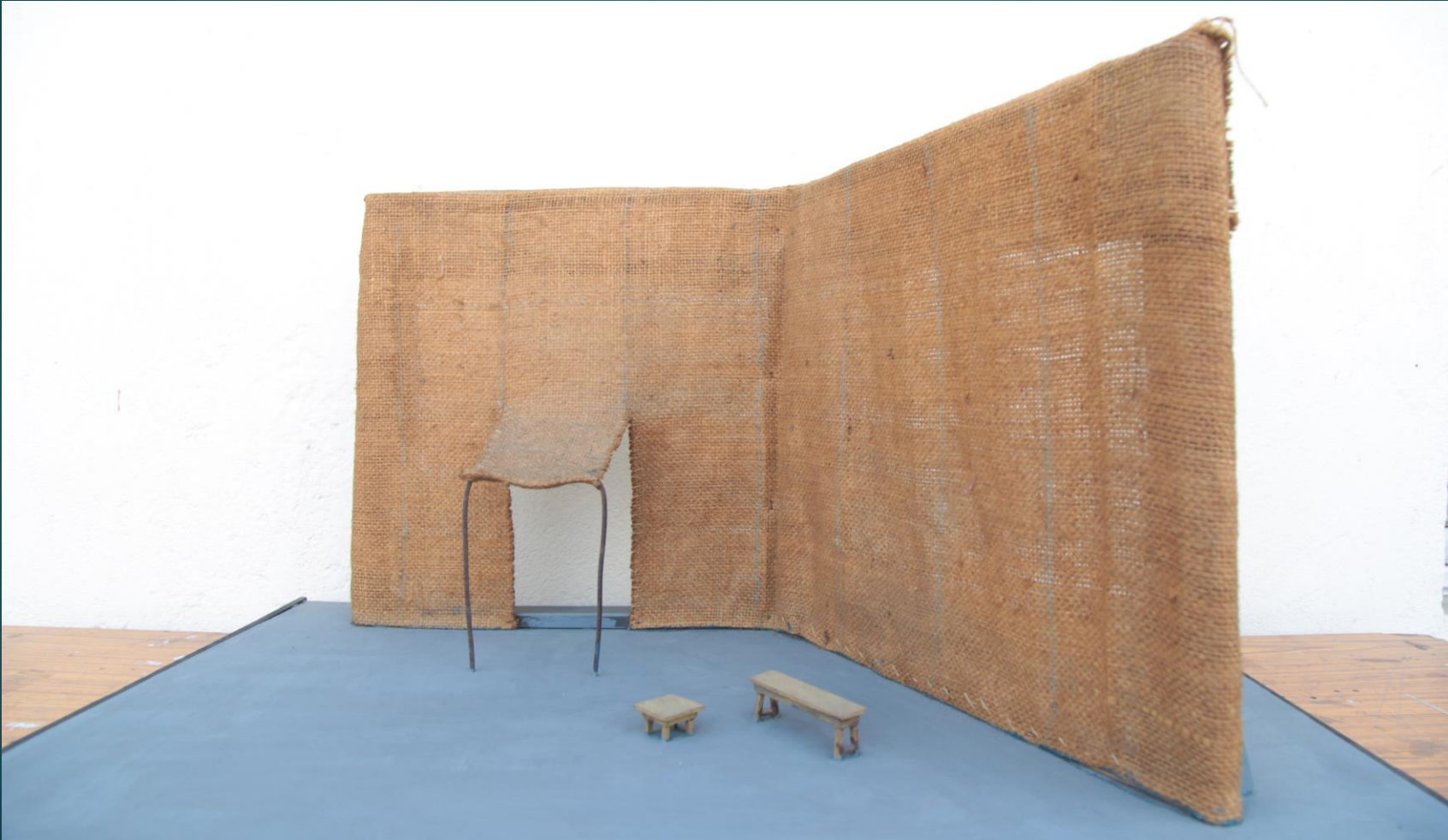
মনোরঞ্জন ভট্টাচার্য

সম্পাদক

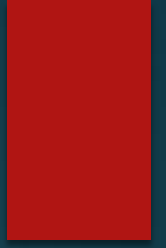
চিত্ত ব্যানার্জি

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*“Nabanna”* set.  
Model by Khaled Chowdhury.  
Photograph: Sujaan Mukherjee.







# Malini Bhattacharya, “IPTA in Bengal”

When one even begins to talk about Bengali theatre today, one has to talk about the ‘theatre movement’ in Bengal. That such a movement exists and that it struggles to establish the performing arts on an alternative economic basis from the thriving commercial theatre is entirely due to the tradition created by the IPTA in the 1940s. The movement is not confined to sporadic, amateur efforts with a restricted audience of the initiate, but has deep, far-reaching roots even in the remotest corners of the state; and however much the hundreds of small, theatrical groups may differ from each other in their specific political persuasions and their modes of experimentation, *they still put up a solid common front against large private ownership in the sphere of the performing arts* and the cultural values it represents. This, too, is largely a legacy of the IPTA.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Malini Bhattacharya, “The IPTA in Bengal”, *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, January to March (1983): 5. [Emphasis mine].

# Malini Bhattacharya

...from the work of the IPTA, one may infer that the term [‘people’] referred mainly to the vast masses of workers, peasants and various sections of the petty bourgeoisie whose ‘struggles for freedom, economic justice and a democratic culture’ all over the world are found to be the predominant characteristic of the period following the First World War. [...] But in the Indian context, the term came to have a richer significance, because in a semi-feudal set-up, the tardy growth of industrial capitalism has ensured a longer lease of life to indigenous forms of folk culture. [...] Its organisational character enabled the IPTA to explore alternative cultural formations still prevalent in non-urban areas and to establish a link between the traditional and the contemporary. [...] *The idea was for cultural activists to go to the people and activate them to create new theatrical forms for themselves.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, 5-6. [Emphasis mine.]

Utpal Dutt, Interview with A. J. Gunawardana, *The Drama Review*, 1971.

Revolutionary theatre is essentially people's theatre, which means that it must be played before the masses. The audience is our first concern; matters of form and content come second. A genuinely revolutionary play put on before an intellectual audience in the city is irrelevant because the intelligentsia simply won't change. Essentially, the revolution is first for workers and peasants. Revolutionary theatre must preach revolution; it must not only expose the system but also call for the *violent smashing of the state machine*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gunawardana, 225.

# Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer”, 1934

The operative writer's mission is not to report but to fight; not to assume the spectator's role but to intervene actively.

Gargi Chakravartty, *P.C. Joshi: A Biography* (National Book Trust, 2007).

“...one of the best ways to let people know about the policies of the party was to travel in the third-class compartment and open the party paper. It was bound to excite curiosity and lead to innumerable questions. That would give the comrades a chance to first understand the opinions and questions of the people and then to clear doubts and prejudices. Indian travelers were inquisitive and in any case discussion was a form of ‘time-pass’ as the vendors of peanuts and *chana chur* would say to increase their sales.”

Imagining the 'People'.  
From the Natya Shodh Archives.



Bijan Bhattacharya's "*Nabanna*" (1944).  
From the Natya Shodh Archives.

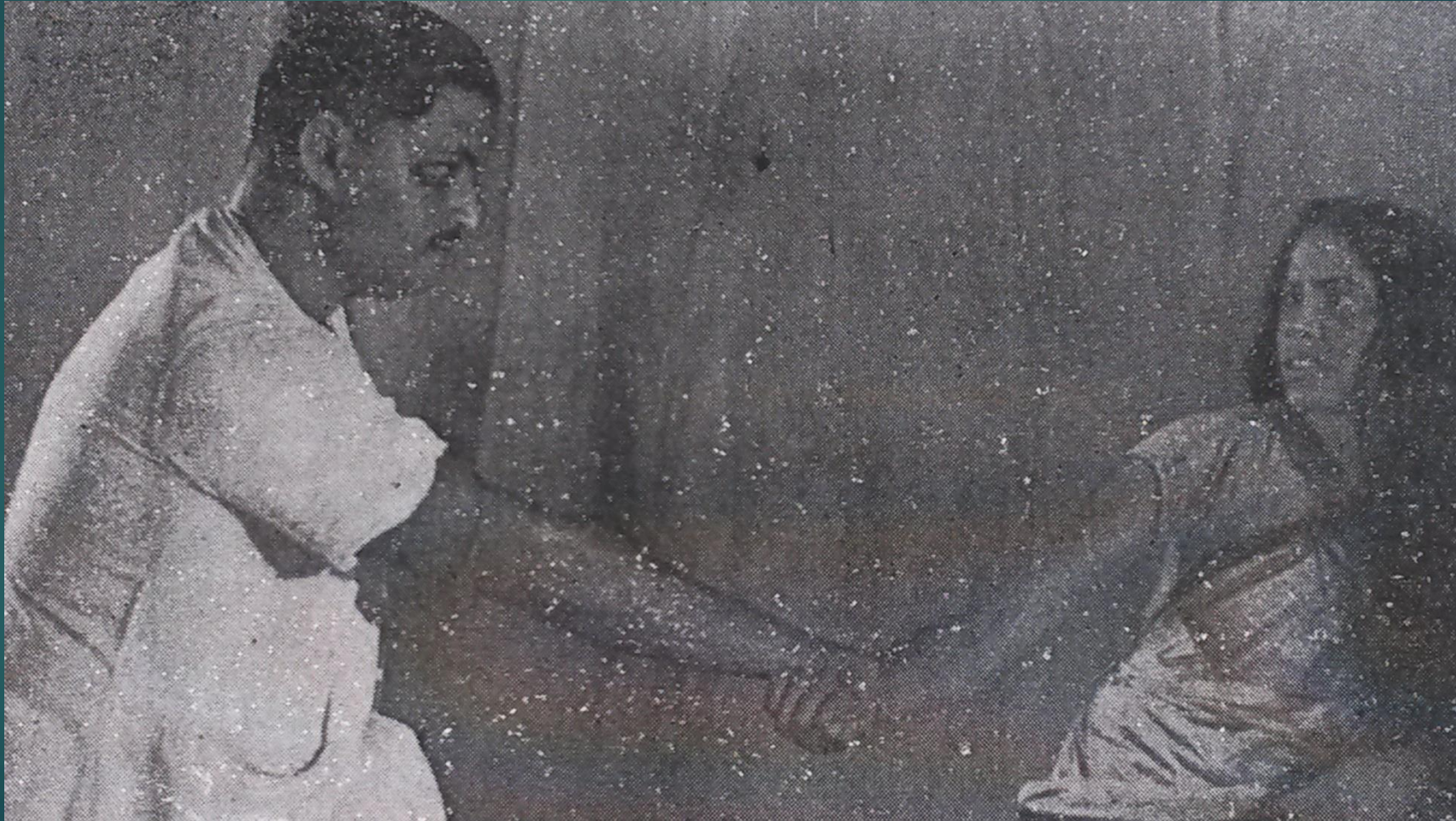






Binodini and Kalidhan Dhara: Tripti Bhaduri and Charuprakash Ghosh

Bahurupi, Nabanna Smarak Sankhya, nos. 33 and 34, vols. I and II, October 1969 and June 1970



Radhika: Sova Sen



Binodini: Tripti Bhaduri



# Kalidhan Dhara: Charuprakash Ghosh



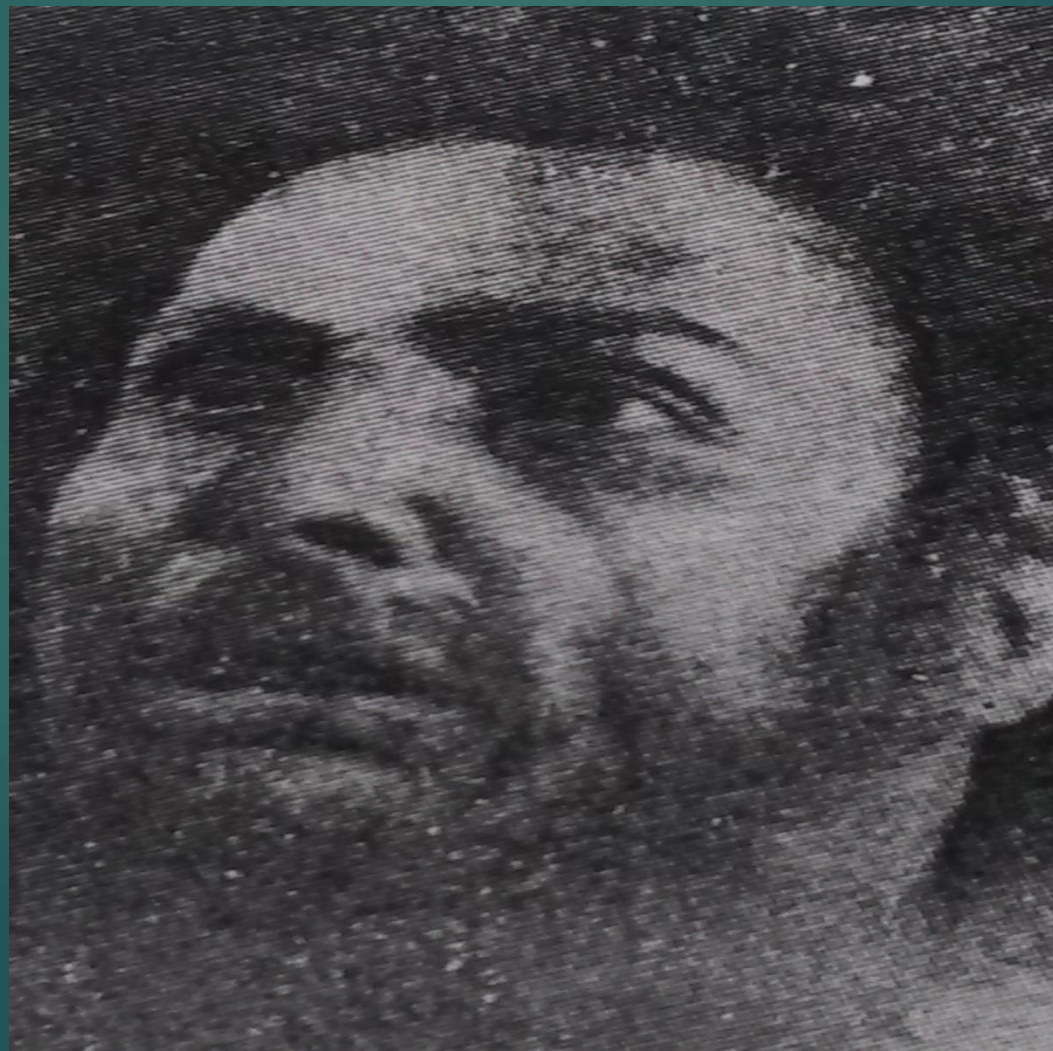
Kunja: Sudhi Pradhan



Haru Dutta: Gangapada Basu



Pradhan Samaddar: Bijon Bhattacharya

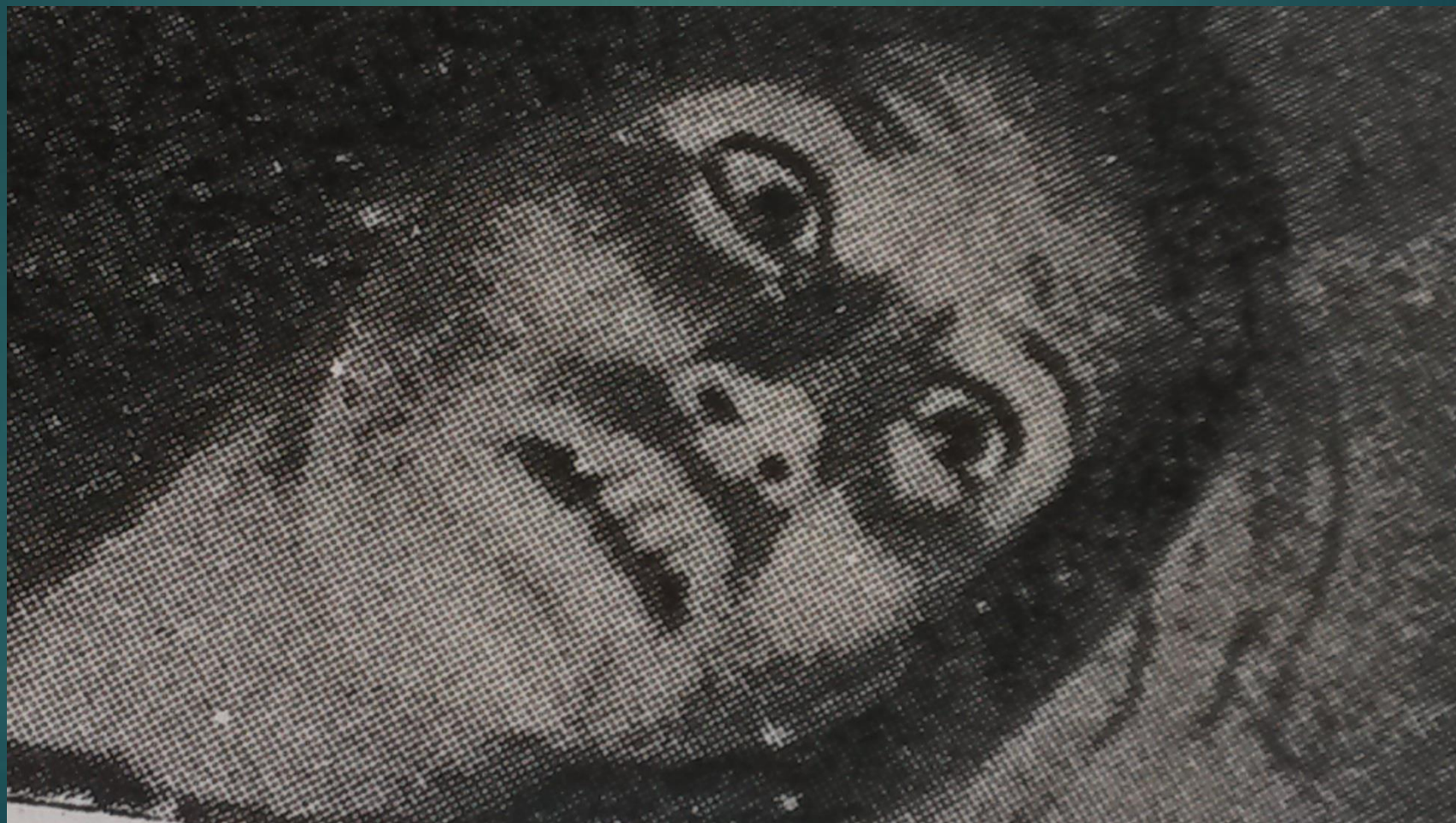




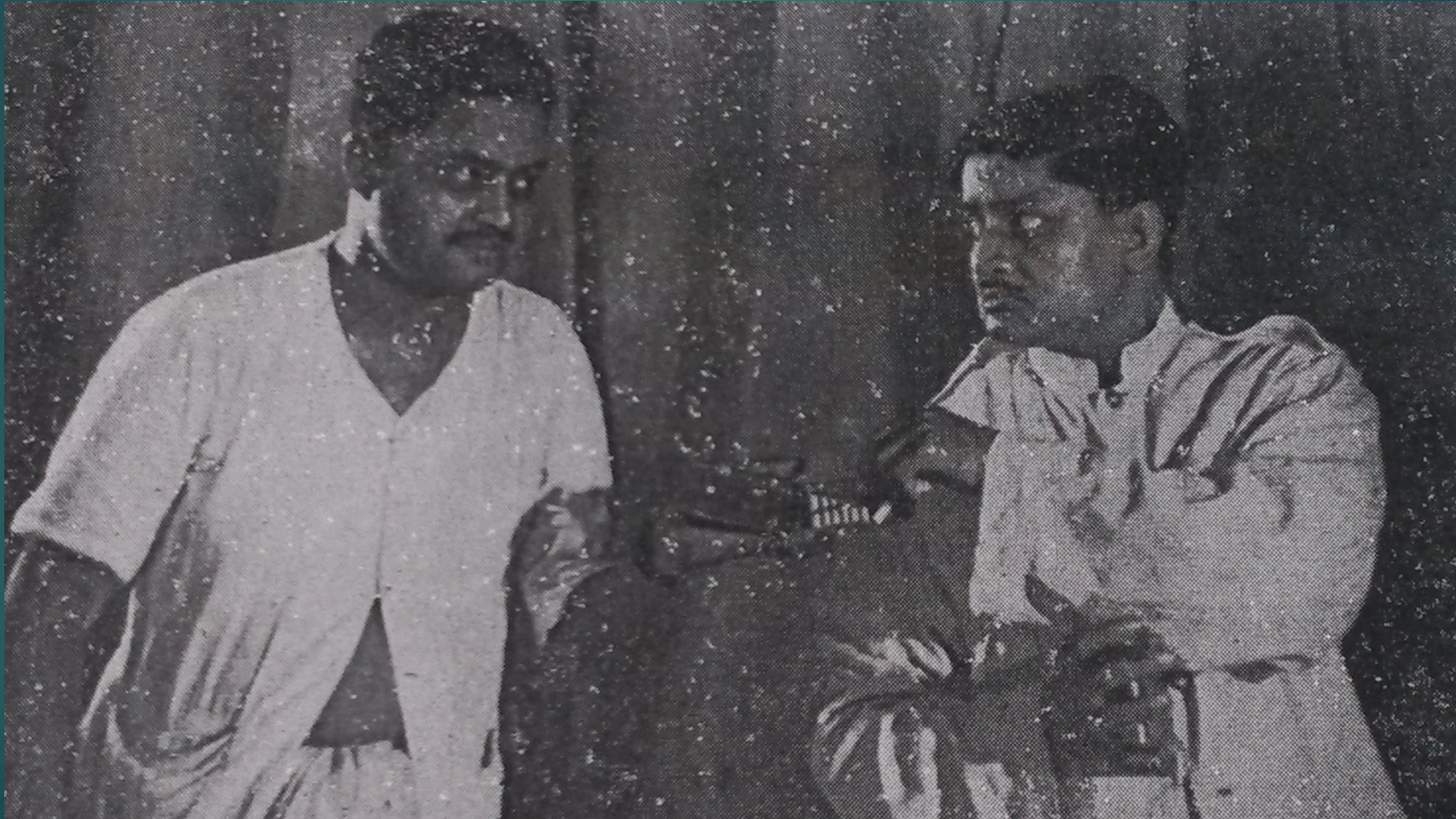
# Kunja and Pradhan



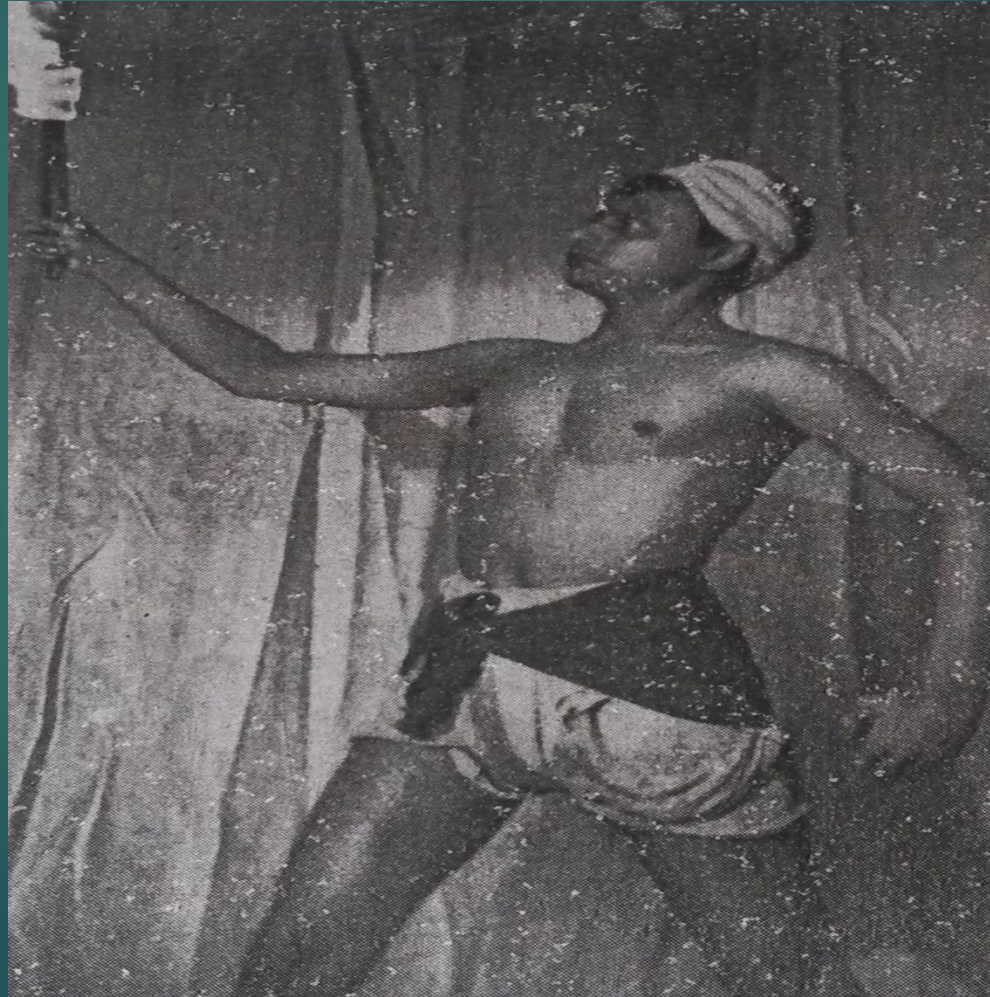
Binodini



## Charuprakash Ghosh and Nimai Ghosh (Darogha)



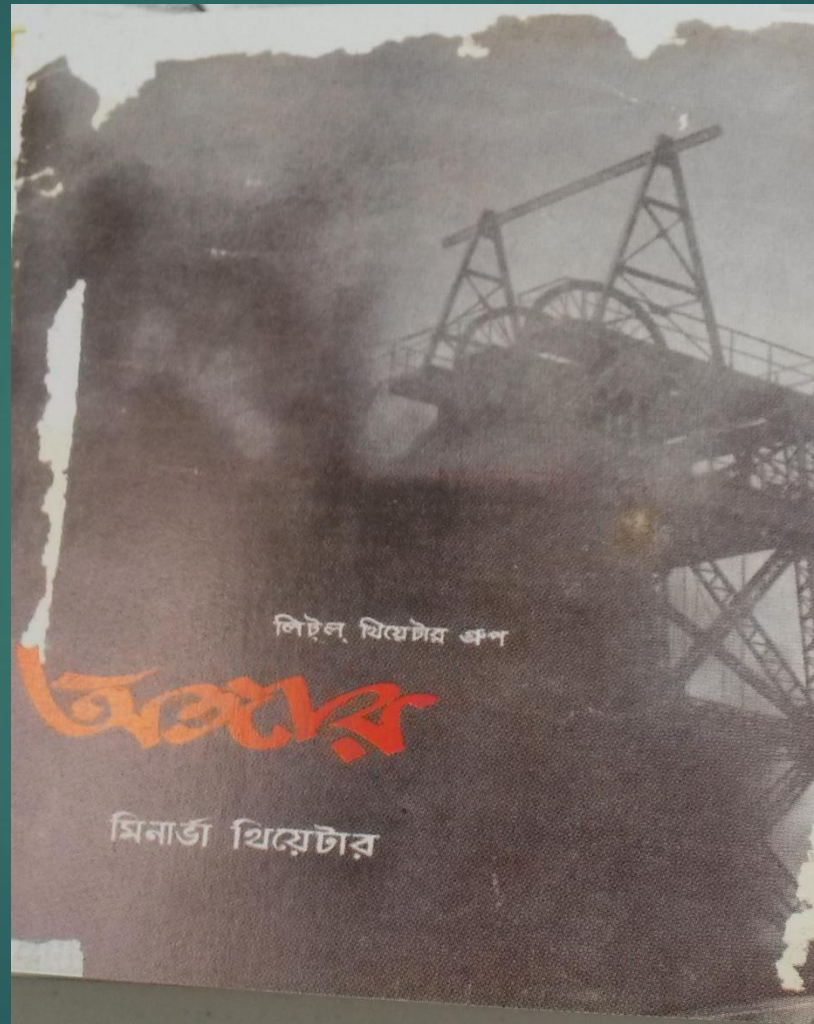
Rabin Majumdar in the first scene.



# Bijan Bhattacharya as Pradhan Samaddar



‘Angar’, cover to the souvenir printed on its 200<sup>th</sup> show



Angar (1959) [Photograph: Sambhu Bandyopadhyay]



Kallol (1965) [Photograph: Sambhu Bandyopadhyay]





Kallol (1965) [Photograph: Sambhu Bandyopadhyay]



Teer (1967) [Photograph: Sambhu Bandyopadhyay]



Model of “Kallol” set from the Natya Shodh archives.



