

Tribute to Dhiren Mukherjee

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**Rekindling the Unknown Cinematic Brilliance:
Dhiren Mukherjee - The Bengali Shopkeeper in Tapan Sinha's
Jhinder Bandi (Prisoner of Jhind)**



In the annals of cinema and theatre, many talents blossom unnoticed, lingering in the shadows of the grand stage until a flicker of opportunity casts light upon their brilliance. Dhirendranath Mukherjee, commonly known as Dhiren Mukherjee, was one such gem whose thespian skills awaited the right moment to gleam under the cinematic arc lights. Born into the culturally vibrant backdrop of Bhagalpur, Bihar, Mukherjee's early life was steeped in a milieu that fostered creativity, where he nurtured a burgeoning passion for acting. As a child in Bhagalpur, a place renowned for its illustrious sons and daughters such as writer Balaichand Mukhopadhyay (Banaful), Ashok Kumar (the renowned actor), and director Tapan Sinha, Mukherjee showed early signs of his theatrical inclinations. This small town, a crucible of talent, was also the birthplace of notable personalities like Gurmeet Choudhary, an Indian television actor, model, and dancer; Kadambini Ganguly, one of India's first female graduates and doctors, who was the daughter of Braja Kishore Bose, the headmaster of Bhagalpur School; and Neha Sharma, an actress known for her work in Hindi and South Indian movies. It was here that Mukherjee's initial forays into acting took shape, participating in local plays that marked the beginning of a lifelong journey in performance art.

The winds of destiny eventually carried Mukherjee and his family to Kolkata, a city with a rich theatrical tradition and burgeoning film industry. It was in the cultural capital of West Bengal that Mukherjee's career found new avenues, although he remained largely unrecognised in the mainstream. Despite the obscurity, his

passion for acting never waned, leading him through roles in films from the late 1920s through the 1940s, such as “Khana.”



Mukherjee’s break came serendipitously when Tapan Sinha, a connection from his Bhagalpur days, visited his shop on Bhupen Bose Avenue for a personal errand.

Recognising Mukherjee’s potential and their shared past, Sinha offered him a role in his upcoming film, “*Jhinder Bandi*”—a

Bengali adaptation of Anthony Hope’s “*The Prisoner of Zenda*,” penned by the eminent Bengali writer Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay. Despite initial hesitation due to his advancing age—Mukherjee was over sixty at the time—his undying zeal for acting led him to accept the part.

In “*Jhinder Bandi*,” Mukherjee portrayed a Bengali shopkeeper, a role brief yet pivotal, marking a significant turning point in the film’s narrative. Though contained within a limited screen time, his performance added a layer of authenticity and emotional depth to the story. The filming took place in the majestic locales of Rajasthan, where Mukherjee joined a stellar cast including Uttam Kumar (protagonist), Soumitra Chatterjee (Antagonist), Tarun Kumar, and Sandhya Roy, Radhamohan Bhattacharya, Arundhati Devi, Dilip Roy among others.

This role not only highlighted Mukherjee’s latent talent but also underscored the film’s critical and commercial success, proving that artistry can indeed find its due recognition, albeit late. His journey from the theatres of Bhagalpur to the cinematic canvas of “*Jhinder Bandi*” serves as a testament to the enduring spirit of an artist who, against the odds, left an indelible mark on the hearts of those who witnessed his craft.

On set, the atmosphere was often charged with the intensity of professional demands; however, it was equally permeated with moments of levity and play. A favourite target for their playful antics was the venerable Dhiren Mukherjee, a respected figure in the industry. Uttam Kumar and Soumitra Chatterjee, brimming with youthful exuberance, would often orchestrate pranks that lightened the mood and strengthened their bonds. One such recurring jest involved the mischievous duo clandestinely hiding Mukherjee’s snuff box, watching with barely suppressed glee as he searched for his beloved item. These pranks, though simple, were a testament to the informal and affectionate relationships that thrived among the crew.

As time marched on and the harsh lights of the studios dimmed into the twilight of retirement, these moments of shared joy and frivolity remained vivid in memory. Soumitra Chatterjee, reflecting on his illustrious career in his later years, often reminisced about the days spent with Dhiren Mukherjee with a fondness that could only be kindled by genuine affection and deep respect. Evidently, the bonds formed during those long shooting days were made of something sturdier than the sets they performed on.

These stories of camaraderie and playful pranks serve as a reminder of the human aspect of filmmaking. This craft is as much about building relationships as it is about creating art. The legacy of these cinematic giants continues to live on, not just through the films they left behind but through the tales of their off-screen exploits, which reveal the rich tapestry of personal connections that the world of cinema so uniquely fosters.



Dhiren Mukherjee's story is a poignant reminder of the hidden

treasures within the art world—talents that bloom quietly, waiting for a moment to shine. Though not widely chronicled, his legacy continues to inspire those who believe in the transformative power of perseverance and passion in the arts. Through his journey, we learn that the stage of life, regardless of its recognition and applause, is worth the performance.

Image sources: <https://www.youtube.com/@uttamkumarmoviess>

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