

Kanan Devi

Remembering a Lost Archive

One would hear the soft melodies of *sapnon me koyi aata hai* from a distance as a neighbour played his old records of, with my grandmother humming to it. An incredible performer, singer, actress extraordinaire – Kanan Bala has vanished from public visibility in a city that once hailed her as a superstar. The occasional mentions of New Theatres, of the peripheral inclusion in discussing male heroes – the public at large has forgotten Kanan Bala's phenomenal journey from the child-artist to the stardom.

Kanan Devi is the voice of a time which unscathed by the playback; Kanan Devi is the unrivalled face from Calcutta who ruled the box-offices nationwide. In a time when the stigmatized world of entertainment offered little space for women, Kanan Devi pioneered in the industry, shone bright as a star, and inspired a future for women artists. With indeterminate lineage, Kanan Devi paved her way into the world of cinema with a humble audition, eventually resulting in her first film, *Jaidev* in 1926. Playing both Radha and Krishna in this silent film, Kanan delivered a graceful radiance that had no inhibition for the camera.

This series of old photographs from a rare private collection curates a narrative that is infused with the personal and the public live(s) of Kanan Bala. Extending over a range of photographers captured by press, crew and studio-photographers like Panna Sen, Sri Subinoy, P Sarkar, Dhiren Dev and other anonymous ones, this collection reactivates memories of the journey of a timeless woman artist. We find Kanan Bala in her natural abode within and beyond the world of cinema; we find a star who seamlessly weaved together the world of the aural and that of the visual with unvarying poise; we find a lost archive waiting to be retraced.

Curatorial note by Jigisha Bhattacharya

Filmography

(As Actor and/ or Singer)

Madan Theatres

- Jaidev/ 1926
- Shankaracharya/ 1927
- Rishir Prem/ 1931
- Jorebarat/ 1931

Radha Film Company

- Bishnu Maya/ 1932
- Prahlad/ 1932
- Sree Gouranga/ 1933
- Char Darvesh/ 1933
- Maa/ 1933
- Hari Bhakti/ 1934
- Kanthahar/ 1935
- Basabdatta/ 1935
- Manomoyee Girls School/ 1935
- Krishna Sudama/ 1936
- Khooni Kaun/ 1936
- Bishabriksha/ 1936

New Theatres

- Bidyapati/ 1937
- Vidyapati/ 1937
- Mukti/ 1937
- Saathi/ 1938
- Street Singer/ 1938
- Sapurey/ 1939
- Sapera/ 1939
- Jawani ki Reet/ 1939
- Parajay/ 1940
- Haar Jeet/ 1940
- Abhinetri/ 1940
- Parichay/ 1941
- Lagan/ 1941

Independent Performances

- Shesh Uttar/ 1942
- Jawab/ 1942
- Jogajog/ 1943
- Hospital/ 1943
- Bideshini/ 1944
- Path Bendhe Dilo/ 1945
- Banphool/ 1945
- Raj Lakshmi/ 1945
- Tumi Aar aami/ 1946
- Arabian Nights/ 1946
- Krishna Leela/ 1946
- Chandrasekhar/ 1947
- Faisla/ 1947
- Bankalekha/ 1948
- Anirban/ 1948

Shrimati Pictures

- Bamuner Meye/ 1949
- Ananya/ 1949
- Anuradha/ 1949
- Mejdidi/ 1950
- Darpachurna/ 1952
- Nababidhan/ 1954
- Debatra/ 1955
- Asha/ 1956
- Andhare Alo/ 1957
- Rajlakshmi O Srikanta/ 1958
- Indranath Srikanta O Annadadidi/ 1959
- Abhay O Srikanta/ 1959

Acknowledgments: Mekhala Sarkar, Sharmistha Gooptu, Madhabi Mukherji,
Kanan Devi