

Notes for Subtitle File kabi-2.srt

This reference text accompanies subtitle file kabi-1.srt for the movie 'Kabi' by Devaki Basu, made in 1949, story and dialogs by Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay.

These terms or concepts from Bangla language or Indian culture and society are discussed not in alphabetical order, but the order in which we get them in the dialogues. Some other related things are mentioned too.

Here we pick up the whole subtitle entry in which the note occurs and discuss it. So first comes the Notes index [#] as we get it in the subtitle file, then comes the entry number in which it occurs in the subtitle file, then the whole entry, and then our comments.

To build this notes file texts of Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay (both the novel and his reminiscences about this novel) were used, together with some other related texts. For the translation of the folk song in Bhojpuri Hindi I took some help from Rekha Singh and Suraj Shah, my colleagues in S A Jaipuria College, Kolkata.

I have spent quite a lot of labor (more than three hundred hours) on this subtitle. I think, Devaki Basu's Kabi should get a much bigger importance than what it gets in the history of Indian films. And it is a film that never fails to create a very passionate response in me as a viewer even after so many views. So I gave my best in creating it. I would like to get any suggestion or any comments from you.

This is the second part of the notes file, to be read with the subtitle file kabi-2.srt.

Dipankar Das
dipankard@gmail.com

Note [01]

8

00:00:46,600 --> 00:00:48,200

First tell me, who's outside?[01]

This one, together with the next few dialogues of Basan depicts the perspective of Basan. In quite a few of Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay's stories and novels, this situation is depicted. These jhumur (see first notes file kabi-1.notes.pdf for their definition) dancers were prostitutes too, and they left this kind of a life. And almost always their bodies were literally thrown away into a dump at their death, as Basan said in the film.

Note [02]

23

00:01:51,500 --> 00:01:53,300

If coal's black tinges the forehead?[02]

See Note [64] in the first notes file for the metaphor of coal-black and Krishna-black. Here the coal-black connection is used by Nitai in a playful attack, because Basan called him koila or coal before. This kind of play of words is constantly used among these jhumur or kabigan people, and very few of them I could translate properly under the constraints of the subtitle file.

Note [03]

24

00:01:54,200 --> 00:01:55,950

Black suits nice on shimul flower.[03]

This is the counter-attack of Basan, because Nitai compared her to shimul flower in the village show. See Note [63] of the first file for the significance of shimul flower as a metaphor. Nitai called Basan shimul flower in the show in the station, just before this conversation.

Note [04]

34

00:03:06,200 --> 00:03:16,200

Teeth of thorns guarding
The flower of keya.[04]

Keya is a kind of screw pine, Pandanus fascicularis in Latin, ketaki in Sanskrit, with a fragrant flower. Because of its fragrance, keya has a dignity that shimul does not, in Nitai's metaphor. And so, Nitai here is correcting his earlier wrong metaphor.

Note [05]

38

00:03:42,100 --> 00:03:43,800

Write it down, for me. [05]

As the novel said, Basan had notebooks full of good songs written by old Vaishnava poets, called mahajan or মহাজন in Vaishnava cannon of Bengal. Nitai was surprised by her knowledge, and wanted to learn from her. So, as a literate artist, singer and dancer, there was a continuous to-and-fro movement between the poetic and artistic on one hand, and real life on the other. When mashi invites, and Nitai goes to the fair to rescue the jhumur group from Naran's attack, the moment Basan sees Nitai, she sings ' _Saw the face at daybreak,/This will be a grand day._ or _প্রভাতে উঠিয়া এ মুখ হেরিনু/দিন যাবে আজ ভাল' -- this is a portion of a famous song from Vaishnava Psalms or বৈষ্ণব পদাবলী -- Basan is well versed in it. Like Nitai is in Ramayana, Mahabharata and Manasamangal. He can leave his home for that, we have seen. Vaishnava tradition with its rich tradition of refined sexuality was always a very living source of material in Bangla literature. Tarashankar

has a lot of such characters and stories. The character Kamal-lata from Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's novel Srikanta is another good example, in the line of Basan. It is no surprise that both of them were big-time screen hits too: Kabi and Kamallata. And also Rai-kamal, made from another Tarashankar story.

Note [06]

52

00:05:18,900 --> 00:05:19,800

Come.[06]

In Bangla language and culture, the word 'go' is not used, 'come' is used. See Note [51] of the first notes file. Here, this word, usually used in a familial context, makes Basan sad.

Note [07]

55

00:05:42,800 --> 00:05:44,800

Wife, wife.[07]

It is not at all surprising that one of the most important characters of the film does not have a name at all. It went exactly the same way in the novel too. She was someone's thakurjhi, the name of a relation, and someone's wife, without a name of her own. See Note [17] of the first notes file. Basan has a name of her own, but she has paid a price for it. This is a good example of common woman's individuality in colonial India. This is true for mashi or মাসি too. It is no name, it is the name of a relation, maternal-aunt. But all through the film/novel she is not attached a name.

Note [08]

62

00:06:32,100 --> 00:06:38,500

Chamunda's palpit is near.[08]

Told her repeatedly to go out in

Tied hair - doesn't listen.

Chamunda is one of the plethora of Mother Goddesses worshiped in Bengal. The realm of spirits, bad or good, falls in a way, in her jurisdiction.

Note [09]

71

00:07:28,200 --> 00:07:34,500

Come, Mother. On your name,

Mother Kamakshi.[09]

Kamakshi is another Mother Goddess.

Note [10]

88

00:08:43,300 --> 00:08:46,100

Mashi is ill.

Ma and Baba both went there.[10]

Here we see the word mashi or मासि used in its relational meaning. Compare Note [07] of this file.

Note [11]

101

00:09:30,500 --> 00:09:36,900

You are my friend, you're kabial.

Tell me the truth, brother![11]

This is the kind of values attached with the kabial system. A kabial is a better human being, he holds a part of the divine magic, and hence he cannot tell a lie. Not just Nitai, people around him were part of this structure too. See Note [36] of the first file.

Note [12]

115

00:11:21,700 --> 00:11:23,800

Come, didi, lie down.[12]

Didi or ददि means elder sister, see Note [19] of the first file. But, here we are seeing a very usual inversion of affection, like father calling daughter as mother. Elder brothers, when in a soft mood, quite a few times call their younger sisters as didi. And this affection dimension of Rajan towards thakurjhi is accumulating intensity. In fact in the very last dialogue of the film, Rajan will call dead thakurjhi as pagli or पागलि, literally meaning feminine of insane, that epitomizes this dimension, which I could not translate. I translated it as 'my insane sister'.

Note [13]

155

00:16:32,100 --> 00:16:35,800

I expelled Naran,

that snake below keya tree.[13]

It is a popular folk belief that in summer, snakes start living under the shade of the keya tree. And this is a continuation of the keya metaphor started by Nitai. These metaphors mean a lot in their lives and thought, as we mentioned earlier.

Note [14]

157

00:16:42,000 --> 00:16:47,100

Show him, you are my kalamani,
Not koilamani any more.[14]

At last Basan calls Nitai as her Krishna, not koila-mani any more. Continuation of metaphors used earlier. See Note [64] of the first file and Note [02] of this file.

Note [15]

163

00:17:05,800 --> 00:17:10,150

In place of Mahadev,
Now under Mahadevi's care.[15]

This film has hundreds of such play on words, and the novel in thousands. Hardly a few of them I could meaningfully translate. Mahadev is the name of a god, literally meaning মহা (maha) or great and দেব (deva) or god. Here, this man refers to mashi, paying him respect by calling her maha-devi, or the great-goddess, as a counterpoint to Mahadev kabi's name.

Note [16]

165

00:17:15,300 --> 00:17:18,700

Any Radhagovinda temple nearby?
I'll visit once.[16]

Radhagovinda is Radha (রাধা) and Govinda (গোবিন্দ), or Radha and Krishna in their couple-form. Radhagovinda temples abound in India till today.

Note [17]

168

00:17:24,300 --> 00:17:33,800

Good. From now, ustad is your
Brother. Take presents from
Him on bhaiphota.[17]

Bhaiphota (Bhai=brother, phota=dot) or ভাইকোঁটা is one of the most emotionally charged rituals in Bangla culture. This is more a folk ritual than religious, though performed with the same seriousness. On this day, sisters in fast give their brothers in fast an auspicious dot of sandal-wood paste on their forehead, and pronounce folk-rhymes like ভাইয়ের কপালে দিলাম কোঁটা, যমের দুয়ারে পড়ল কাঁটা, or, dots on my brother's forehead, thorns on the door of Yama -- obviously to drive away death from the brother. Usually presents are given by brothers to their sisters on this day, which mashi here refers to.

Note [18]

181

00:19:20,300 --> 00:19:56,800

My soul burns to grab him,
The moon of Radha's vision,
Who is black in love's kajal.[18]

We know from earlier discussions, Krishna is black, reflected in his names Kalachand or Kalamani or Kalomanik, kala (কালো) and kalo (কালো) meaning black. The word krishna in Sanskrit means black too. Now, this very exquisite (you have to be a Bengali to get the full beauty of it) and elaborate metaphor says that Krishna is black in the kajal of love of Radha. Kajal or কাজল is a black herbal paint used to underline and beautify the eyes. Applying kajal to the eye-lids is a very tender thing, and it is done from tender emotions too. And as if, this tender love of Radha reflected in her kajal makes Krishna black. In fact this was the first line of the song, প্রেমের কাজল কালো, or, black in the kajal of love, and then came রাধার নয়নচাঁদে, or, the moon of eye of Radha, and then the third line, ধরিতে হিয়ার মাঝে আমার পরান কাঁদে, or, to grab him in my person I crave. But, under those constraints: as few lines as possible not to hinder the view, and that 35 character mark that I mentioned in the first file, and obviously my limited translation skills, I could not translate them in their proper order. They were actually inverted.

Note [19]

200

00:22:16,500 --> 00:22:20,350

But you please touch fire to my
Face, who else is there for me?[19]

When a hindu is dead, his/her body is burned. Someone has to set fire to the body, and the custom is to put fire to the face of the body. And it becomes pretty important, emotionally or otherwise, who sets this fire to the face. Usually offspring has that right or duty. And when no one like that is there, it is done by someone loved. This is the ultimate bond of dependence and emotion -- who sets fire to the face.

Note [20]

201

00:22:21,300 --> 00:22:27,400

Chandrabali
Is like makal fruit,[20]
Nothing else but color.

Another very elaborate metaphor is starting here. Chandrabali we already know, from Note [62] of the first file. And makal or hodgsonia non-edible fruit of bright red color. The significance of this metaphor is clear, as it shows in the following line. As we said before in the Note [57] of the first file, jhumur proceeds through a loosely defined

dramatic depiction. Here Naran depicts Nitai as Krishna, and Basan as Chandrabali, who is compared to makal -- a bad choice by Krishna allured by the meaningless brightness.

Note [21]

204

00:22:43,000 --> 00:22:53,600

It is sheer bad luck

That killed you.[21]

This is the start of another metaphor in this song -- the cremation metaphor. Once the kill motif comes up, all the derivative metaphors rise from the cremation context in the next few lines, like, fire to the face, or lighting nurho or নুড়া, meaning dry straw, which is a must for hindu burning-ghat or cremation procedures. And the same dry straw is used to light tobacco in the indigenous pipe called hnuko or হুকো, so it is no big deal to jump to the next metaphor of smoking tobacco by taking fire from a burning corpse -- a ploy to picturize the whole relation between Krishna and Chandrabali as something utterly vulgar. And, in the same move, it attacks Nitai and Basan, now the opponent in the jhumur fight.

Note [22]

206

00:23:06,100 --> 00:23:19,800

Alas, Kalachand,[22]

_Visit a doctor, _

Your eye is sick.

We already know, Kalachand is the name of Krishna, whose symbol now Nitai is, in this jhumur depiction.

Note [23]

215

00:24:11,500 --> 00:24:27,200

A and B and C and all - ...[23]

Goddesses on every alphabet

The original lines here is an example of nice and nice-sounding piece of simple poetry on part of Nitai, creating a kind of list of some of the Mother Goddesses. But, translating that was beyond me. So I made this up. Let me mention here one interesting but implicit point. The Mother Goddesses listed by Nitai are all representative of the Shakta or শাক্ত cult, worshipping shakti (power or mother-goddess) -- and there is a difference here from the romantic love-centric and sexuality-centric religious beliefs popularly practiced in Vaishnava cult, that Basan represents. This will become much clearer later, in dialogues of Basan, when she is fantasizing about her future.

Note [24]

219

00:25:05,200 --> 00:25:11,700

Hang devotion. Use kheurh and
Slang. Or they will burry us.[24]

This word kheurh or খেউড় is still a common word in modern Bangla. It means slang, vulgar words, mud-slinging. And obviously it underlines the commercialization aspect of serious art, like in the journey from kabigan to jhumur. The coming dialogues make this clearer. The money aspect directly comes into operation when mashi speaks.

Note [25]

248

00:29:34,500 --> 00:29:41,800

This Naran called her Chandrabali,
And me Kalachand.[25]

As we said, this is the dramatic depiction in jhumur.

Note [26]

252

00:29:46,200 --> 00:29:49,500

Messenger Brinda.[26]
Yes, Brinda.

Now Nitai is using counter-depiction. Brinda was an aged woman, as legend goes, working as a messenger between Radha and Krishna. This metaphor was used once before too, in the very first encounter between Nitai and Basan, where metaphoric statements were used. I forgot to attach a note there. This was the rhyme created then and there by Nitai: Brinda, bring bashikaran-vine,/I'll lace Shyam in its twine. Shyam is the name of Krishna, and for bashikaran see Note [61] of the first file.

Note [27]

255

00:30:06,200 --> 00:30:23,800

No more any death for you.
Even Yama is afraid to come.[27]

Yama, we know, is the god of death. See Note [53] of the first file.

Note [28]

256

00:30:25,300 --> 00:30:26,400

Listen, dohar.[28]

Dohar is an assistant to the poet/singer/kabi in a jhumur or kabial performance. See Note [09] of the first file.

Note [29]

268

00:30:55,800 --> 00:30:56,400

All say - haribol.[29]

Haribol or হরিবোল and Balohari Haribol or বলাহরি হরিবোল is the slogan of cremation procession and cremation procedure. Actually this is balo or speak and Hari or the name of Krishna, and the same thing in reverse. See Note [21] [22] of the first file. There it was used as a sign of disapproval: cremation slogan uttered in a festival. And here it is used as a death slogan in a mock death.

Note [30]

269

00:30:56,500 --> 00:30:59,300

Balohari Haribol.[30]

See Note [29] above.

Note [31]

291

00:32:43,300 --> 00:32:45,300

I'm tying gnatcharha with you.[31]

This was a popular practice among folk people, under the influence of the Vaishnava cult. There are lots of other examples in Tarshankar and other writers. It is loosely-defined marriage. One can tie or untie the gnatcharha knot at one's will. This tie is done between the clothes worn by both the spouses. This is a part of the mainstream hindu Bengali marriage too.

Note [32]

300

00:33:56,000 --> 00:33:59,850

Get ready, ready, barbela will start,
Good time of journey will go by.[32]

Barbela or বারবেলা means inauspicious time, shown in traditional Bengali religious almanac.

Note [33]

Note [34]

305

00:34:14,700 --> 00:34:19,200

Yes. Or we can't reach Bardhaman

Fair in three days time.[33]

307

00:34:21,500 --> 00:34:28,300

That list ready. From there to

Nadia, then Murshidabad, Malda![34]

Bardhaman, Nadia, Murshidabad, Malda -- these are all districts of West Bengal.

Note [35]

310

00:34:41,300 --> 00:34:43,400

First in Katwa - drip in Ganges.[35]

Katwa is an important town in Bardhaman district of West Bengal. See Note [50] of the first file. And a drip in Ganges is believed to be very holy by hindus, something that all are eager to do.

Note [36]

Note [37]

Note [38]

334

00:37:24,400 --> 00:37:27,150

Take resort in Mahaprabhu.[36]

335

00:37:28,300 --> 00:37:30,500

Make a hut in Nabadwip.[37]

336

00:37:31,400 --> 00:37:37,200

And live on alms, singing

Padabali for the devotees.[38]

These all are important motifs from the Vaishnava cult represented by Basan. Mahaprabhu or মহাপ্রভু means Chaitanya, a major religious and social reformer of Bengal in in fifteenth century, a major contributor to the Vaishnava cult of belief, religion and lifestyle. Taking his resort means leaving all other forms of livelihood than singing his name and living on alms. Nabadwip was the birth place of Chaitanya, where the Vaishnava cult is very strong, even today. Padabali means the poems/songs by great Vaishnava poets. See Note [05] above, in this file.

Note [39]

351

00:39:27,250 --> 00:39:29,500

Lest Basan's hysteri is there![39]

The English word hysteria is getting distorted on the folk tongue. Compare Note [26] in the first file.

Note [40]

Note [41]

356

00:39:51,400 --> 00:39:53,900

No! Why you? Give me![40]

357

00:39:54,200 --> 00:39:54,900

Let that be.[41]

Even at this moment, Basan suffering from intense illness, Basan cannot forget that it is not a man's role to do household chores, and tries to rectify it. It reflects the culture she represents.

Note [42]

361

00:40:03,800 --> 00:40:05,200

Give it later.[42]

This is signal that Basan is going to die soon. It was a custom among doctors not to take the fee when they are sensing imminent death.

Note [43]

380

00:41:13,100 --> 00:41:14,900

The best kabial will get a

Gold madel.[43]

The changing language -- distortion of the English words. See Note [26] in the first file.

Note [44]

423

00:45:05,700 --> 00:45:08,000

Take Govinda's name,

You'll suffer less.[44]

Govinda is another name of Krishna. See Note [16] above in this file and Note [62] in the first file.

Note [45]

426

00:45:21,200 --> 00:45:32,500

Dinabandhu, Radhanath,

Pity on me in my next birth.[45]

Dinabandhu and Radhanath are names of Krishna too. See Note [62] in the first file.

Note [46]

465

00:55:35,700 --> 00:55:45,100

She said, jamaidada,

Spread flowers on my chita.[46]

Chita or चिता is the burning bed of a dead body in hindu cremation. Compare Note [19] and Note [21] above in this file.