

Cinema

Lal Shalu: A thrust against hypocrisy and bigotry

Lal Shalu screened

FAYZA HAQ

TANVIR Mokammel, the director of "Lal Shalu" (screened yesterday at Shawkat Osman Auditorium of Public Library) says "I have been planning to make this film for a long time. I wrote a book 'Syed Waliullah's Sisyphus and Quest of Tradition in Novel'. Going through this book again and again I found possibilities of making a film. Then I got hold of a copyright and made the film last year. The greatness is in the theme." The novel was published in 1948. In the novel suddenly a 'mullah' appears in a remote East Bengal village. He begins worshipping a dilapidated grave in a bamboo grove, chanting Quranic verses. He put a red cloth on top of the grave from which comes the name. The credulous villagers begin to believe in miracles of the grave and the man gradually becomes rich and powerful. He marries a hard working peasant woman and being more intelligent than the average villagers he gathers more power and manipulates the whole village according to his fancies. He then marries a second time and this time a young woman and that girl does not believe in the man's myths. Gradually this makes the man lose his confidence and composure and finally he is exposed. He treats some of the villagers quite badly, even breaking up one or two marriages. Ultimately mother nature took revenge and a big flood washes away his existence.

"I condemn the few cunning who take advantage of the weak and innocent," says Tanvir adding "what is worse is all this exploitation is done in the name of religion and promote their own personal ambitions. I wrote the script myself based on Waliullah's novel".

Talking about the actors, Mokammel says, "Majid, the archetype of the evil 'mullah' has been played by Rasiul Islam Asad, who is a renowned theatre and film actor of our country. The two wives have been played by Munira Yusuf Maemi and the



Memi (L) and Tithi in a dramatic scene

second wife was Chandni. These are theatre people and I mostly watched them on the stage before selecting them. The young wife was spotted on TV. The other minor characters are played by the different people in the village itself. I worked on a shoe string budget."

Asked if people overseas would get an adverse opinion of the country seeing the film, Mokammel says, "These things happened in their own country a

hundred or two hundred years back and during the Middle Ages Europe was riddled with religious hypocrites who exploited the simple villagers. They too can relate to the story. The film is to project the problems of human beings as in any other art film and it is not to entertain. Here is a particular situation in the backdrop of a grave worshipper and how the society around him reacted to his conniving. Things have changed since that time half



Asad (L) and Chadni, the young wife of the pir

a century back but the obsessions with grave worship and 'pirs' are still prevalent. I personally don't think that you need a middle man to approach God. This is stressed in the first wife's last lines when she says, 'Forget about the paddy and think about human lives.'"

Touching on the problems he faced while making the film, Mokammel says, "The main problem was the limited funds. Also, we don't have proper technology in the country. We don't have got camera, good lab or good sound equipment. A professionally acceptable film is difficult to make in Bangladesh. It was however shown in the London and Rotterdam film festivals and now in March we have invitations for four other festivals in Belgium, Switzerland, Wales, Friebourg as well as in Kerala and unfortunately I don't have the money to make more prints."

"We had to wait for the seasons of rain and thunder and this took time. Again our camera was once taken away from us as some pictures of some ministers had to be shot while we waited. This was naturally frustrating as it was a set back for us and we had to redo the sets again. This was a problem as ours was a low budget film."

Since his university days Tanvir Mokammel he was a film society activist working for better cinema. He made "Hulia," Nadir Nam Modhimoti" with the background of the liberation war of 1971, "Quiet Flows the River Chitra" with the backdrop of the 1947 Partition.

The synopsis of the film
"Lal Salu" (A tree without roots) written by Syed Waliullah is perhaps the most remarkable novel written about the rural Muslim community of East Bengal (now Bangladesh). In Bangladesh Syed Waliullah is regarded as a writer of profound depth with deep insight. The novel 'Lal Salu' was published in 1948.

In a remote agrarian village in the marshy region of Bangladesh, suddenly a Mullah appears. He is a haggard-looking



The director: Tanvir Mokammel

man in his middle age named Majid. After arriving in the village Majid starts to clean up an old dilapidated grave, located in a forlorn bamboo grove. Majid decorates the grave and by declaring it as the shrine of a famous Pir (a holy man) begins to workshop it. He scolded the ignorant villagers for neglecting the grave of such a holy person and for keeping it uncared for so long. The villagers, of course,

have no clue who the holyman was, and though it is a hoax, gradually begin to believe in the myth. But the novelist has treated Majid with empathy as well. That is Majid, a man battered in life with a chequered career, knowingly treads this dangerous path of falsehood just to survive, only to eke out a living.

Majid, being shrewder than the simple villagers around and being knowledgeable about the fear



Asad, the pir, offering prayers

psychosis of the common people, succeeds to create a supernatural awe and mystery around the grave and gradually brings the whole village, including the village headman Khalek Bepari, under his sway.

The mystery of the shrine, the red fabric spread over its oval shape, the shining candles and the Quranic chants which Majid recites beside the grave during morning and in evening, create such an aura of mystery in the ambience of the shrine, that the villagers, mostly poor simple peasants, completely succumb to Majid's spell. People start to bring offering of rice and money to the 'holy' grave.

Majid, of course, as the caretaker of the shrine, receives those offerings. The shrine, over the years, not only provides Majid economic solvency but the psychological domination over the village community as well. From a vagabond desperado, he turns into a man rooted in social life. Then Majid feels the need of a wife. He marries Rahima, a not-so-young but hard working peasant woman. Rahima, though robustly built, remains a docile and obedient wife to her powerful husband. But as Majid's wealth and social power increase, he feels the need of a younger wife.

Majid marries Jamila, a teenage girl, with full of libido and no fear for either the grave or for Majid. Jamila becomes a kind of nemesis for Majid who is helplessly infatuated to his young sensuous wife. Majid gradually loses his composure and self-confident which are so imperative for his vocation and soon the assiduously peddle myth shrouded around the 'holy' grave becomes exposed. Jamila, a simple young girl, inadvertently helps the make belief world of the powerful men to collapse, and Mother Nature, in the form of a big flood, strikes as Majid oversteps the boundary line of humanity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Book Fair

Amar Ekushey Grantha Mela, a three-week long book fair at the premises of Bangla Academy is in progress. The fair is open everyday from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Time & expression

Second solo photography exhibition titled Time & Expression by Iftekhar Wahid Ifte opens today at Indian Cultural Centre. Noted photographer Intiaz Alam Beg will inaugurate the show while dramatist Mannan Hira will be present as chief guest. The four-day show will run till February 22.

Boutique exhibition

An exhibition of boutique items titled *Ghorowa Poshak Prodorshoni* is being held at Ali's Knitwear Bangladesh at Hse-49, Rd-15/A, Dhanmondi. The display includes items of traditionally designed saree, punjabi, shalwar kameez, indigenous apparels and hand-made wax candle. The exhibition remains open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. everyday till February 22.

Group art exhibition

Nine contemporary artists are displaying their works in a group exhibition that is being held at the Zainul Art Gallery of Fine Arts Institute in the city. The show will continue till February 21 from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. everyday.

Drama Festival

Natty Utsav 2002, the national festival of drama is going on at the Mahila Samity auditorium in the city. A drama of a particular group is staged everyday at 6:30 p.m. The festival will continue till February 20 organised by Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation.

Art Exhibition

A 12-day painting exhibition by renowned artist Maruf Ahmed started at the Shilpangan Art Gallery in the city from February 7, 2002. The show will remain open for all till February 18, from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. everyday.

Movies

Filmfare gives Lagaan a 7-star salute

47th Annual Manikchand Filmfare Awards Night held

THE *Lagaan* team clean bowled all competition at the 47th annual Manikchand Filmfare awards night on Saturday evening, bagging as many as seven popular awards, including Best Film, Best Director (Ashutosh Gowariker) and Best Actor (Aamir Khan). Kajol's stellar performance in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* won her the Best Actress award.

The *Lagaan* crew sat together in one part of the enclosure, robustly cheering every time one of their team members went up to collect an award. However, skipper Aamir Khan himself was absent and Rani Mukherjee picked up the prizes for him. Kajol, draped in yellow chiffon, enthusiastically dedicated her award to her grandmother. *Lagaan's* winning streak continued

through the music section where it clinched another four awards, including Best lyrics (Javed Akhtar), Female playback (Alka Yagnik for 'O re chhore'), Best male playback (Udit Narayan for 'O mitwa') and Best music (A R Rahman). Indiatimes is a media partner of *Lagaan*.

Dil Chahta Hai was judged Best Film in the critics' category. The Best Actress award in this section went to Karisma Kapoor (*Zubeida*), while Amitabh Bachchan won the prize for Best Actor (*Aks*).

The awards night had all the ingredients of a regular Hindi blockbuster melodrama and tension, laughter and tears and the mandatory song-'n'-dance sequences. The inimitable Jaaved Jaffrey teamed up with the witty Archana Puran Singh to navigate the show with military precision, ensuring that the function wound up well before the supreme court-stipulated deadline of 10 pm. The duo's one-liners and spoofs on everything from George Bush and Osama Bin Laden to 'saas bahu

their profession. While some set the stage on fire with their electrifying performances, others sat back and cheered the winners.

Interviews of Nominees by Filmfare
Hrithik Roshan On Being Nominated for Best Supporting Actor (K3G)

He's danced his way into your hearts ever since his debut 'Kaho Na Pyaar Hai'. Excelling equally as well at action and dramatic scenes, Hrithik sure promises to deliver hard hitting performances in the years to come. Here he is on being nominated in the Best Supporting Actor category of the 2001 Filmfare Awards...

Q: What does Filmfare Awards mean to you?

Hrithik Roshan: "The Filmfare Award represents recognition for your hard work and the effort that you put in. And I think it imbues a fair and healthy sense of competition between artists and technicians. It's a great feeling to go out there and hold that award. I've experi-

you'll go completely wrong. I consider that the wrong attitude. For me it's just pure fun."

Q: Who do you consider your closest competitor?

Hrithik: "Well, if you ask me, all the other nominees are actors whom I think I don't stand a chance against. They're all great actors and they've done marvelous jobs in their respective fields. I'm just happy to be nominated and that people consider me worthy to be mentioned in that list of nominees. It's a good feeling. According to me I was satisfied with my work in the film."

Q: Were you expecting the nomination?

Hrithik: "I don't expect anything from the awards. It doesn't occur to me so far when I work it hasn't so far. I'm sure next time when I'm praised for a performance, I will associate it with an award and wonder if I will be a nominee or not especially since it's happened twice before. But so far that hasn't happened."

Q: Do you expect to win?

Hrithik: "Like I said, I'm proud to be a nominee and that's as much as I feel. I don't want to expect anything, because expecting would be foolish."

Manoj Bajpai On Being Nominated for Best Performance In A Villainous Role



Kajol speaks after receiving the "Best Actress" award (L). Ashutosh Gowariker receives the "Best Director" award from actress Rekha at the 47th annual Filmfare Awards 16 February 2002 in Bombay (R). Gowariker received the award for his work on the film "Lagaan" which portrays a village struggle under British rule in the 19th century. The film has also been nominated for best foreign film at the Oscars.

"Satya" brought him recognition and Manoj has never looked back since. 'Kaun', 'Aks' and 'Zubeida' have helped establish him as an actor to reckon with in the numbers game. Here he is on being nominated for Best Performance In A Villainous Role at the 2001 Filmfare Awards.

Q: What do Filmfare Awards mean to you?
Manoj: "Filmfare Awards mean a lot to me. I have been nominated earlier too. I think it is a great reward for all the effort that you put in."

Q: How do you feel to be nominated for Best Performance in A Villainous Role?

Manoj: "Oh it feels great. I am absolutely delighted about the nomination."

Q: Were you expecting it?

Manoj: "Actually, I expected to be nominated for 'Zubeida' where I have worked really hard. However, my role in 'Aks' does stand out and I have put in a lot of hard work there too."

Q: Do you expect to win?
Manoj: "I am sure everyone who has been nominated in this category has worked equally hard on their respective roles. So I think I'll leave that decision to the jury! I'm definitely keeping my fingers crossed."

Q: Who would you consider your strongest competition?
Manoj: "Like I said, I think each of the actors has worked hard on their roles and it would be wrong on my part to discount any of their performances. All I can say is, I've certainly got great competition!"

JAVED AKHTAR - On being nominated for the Filmfare Awards 2001
Q: How do you feel on being nominated for the Filmfare Awards 2001? What's your reaction?

JAVED: "When I was in school, Filmfare, the magazine, was much smaller in size with a yellow border and a picture in the centre. The Filmfare Awards was annually a topic of conversation we actively indulged in and now to be nominated for it, is definitely a matter of pride. Yes, I have been fortunate enough to have received a few trophies but the Awards still have

within them glamour enough to be attracted for more."

Q: Did you expect to be nominated for it?

JAVED: "Yes! Reasonably so, because the music of 'Lagaan' became quite a rage. I did expect even 'Dil Chahta Hai' to feature, nonetheless the popularity of 'Lagaan' is unimaginable."

Q: Do you expect to win the Filmfare Award this year?
JAVED: "I suppose all of us who have been nominated expect to win, so why should I be an exception?"

Q: Who would you consider your strongest competition?
JAVED: "I have great respect for Anand Bakshiji and Sameer, and there's a newcomer, Anil Pandey, within the list of contenders. They all have done their jobs well, and therefore I would consider each one of them strong competition."

Q: What do Filmfare Awards mean to you?
JAVED: "Filmfare Awards has always held a special place in my heart. It is of great nostalgic value. For me, they are my Oscars."

Source: Internet

Winners of the 47th Annual Manikchand Filmfare Awards

- Best Film (Popular)**
Lagaan
- Best Director (Popular)**
Ashutosh Gowariker (Lagaan)
- Best Film (Critics)**
Dil Chahta Ha
- Best Actor (Popular)**
Aamir Khan (Lagaan)
- Best Actress (Popular)**
Kajol (K3G)
- Best Actor (Critics)**
Amitabh Bachchan (Aks)
- Best Actress (Critics)**
Karisma Kapoor (Zubeidaa)
- Best Actor In A Supporting Role**
Akshaye Khanna (Dil Chahta Hai)
- Best Actress In A Supporting Role**
Jaya Bachchan (K3G)
- Best Performance In A Comic Role**
Saif Ali Khan (Dil Chahta Hai)
- Best Performance In A Villainous Role**
Akshay Kumar (Ajnabee)
- Best Music Director**
A R Rehman (Lagaan)
- Best Lyricist**
Javed Akhtar (Lagaan)
- Best Male Playback Singer**
Udit Narayan (Lagaan)
- Best Female Playback Singer**
Alka Yagnik (Lagaan)

Schedule of National Drama Festival

Venue: Mahila Samity auditorium, Dhaka			
18 Feb	6:30 p.m.	Dhaka Theater, Dhaka	Na Noiramoni
19 Feb	6:30 p.m.	Drishwapat, Dhaka	Chop, Adalat Cholchey
20 Feb	6:30 p.m.	Monchomukt Natya Sham	Shingkranti

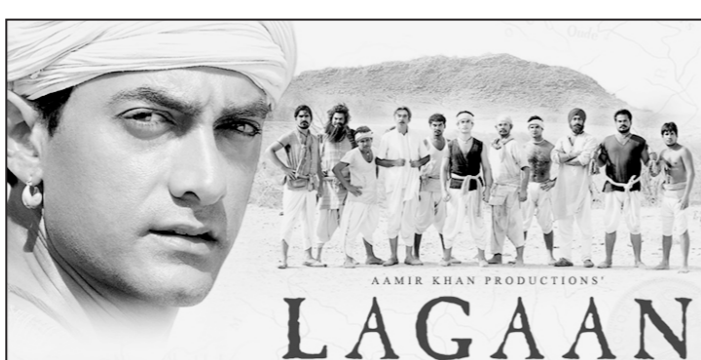


Amitabh Bachchan Best Actor (Critics) Jaya Bachchan Best Actress In A Supporting Role Akshaye Khanna Best Actor In A Supporting Role Akshay Kumar Best Villainous Role Saif Ali Khan Best Comic Role

soaps kept the audience in splits despite the nail-biting tension of the evening.

The grounds at the Bandra-Kurla complex glittered as a galaxy of stars from the Indian film firmament descended to be part of the annual super-show that salutes the best in

enced it. It's exciting, it's fun. There is nothing serious about any award function and there should never be. To me it's an excitement which should not be taken seriously. I think that's what an award stands for. Because if you start expecting, and you start working for awards, then



Historical film Lagaan received 7 awards to its name



Karisma Kapoor received the Best Actress (Critics) award for Zubeida