

INTERVIEW

The ghosts of memory, regret, and guilt return: A conversation with Ayman Asib Shadhin

Ayman Asib Shadhin has spent much of his life in a focused, almost ascetic pursuit of cinema, a passion that's made him fluent across a wide range of world film.

LAMIA SULTANA KAKON

He debuted as a screenwriter with the dark comedy-thriller *Mainkar Chipay* (2020), the first Bangladeshi ZEE5 original film, followed by *Contract* (2021), the platform's first Bangladeshi original series, which he co-wrote and adapted from Mohammad Nazimuddin's bestselling thriller. In 2022, he penned the screenplay and dialogue for Hoichoi's hit detective series *Kaiser*, also working as post-production supervisor and director's assistant. Most recently, he wrote the feature film *Utshob* (2004), which seemed to be a loose adaptation of the novella *A Christmas Carol* (1843) by Charles Dickens.

Beyond production, Shadhin spent four years as a film critic and translator, publishing essays in Bangla and English, and co-authored the nonfiction book *Cine-loid* (Chaitanya Publishers, 2017), which received an enthusiastic response from cinephiles. I spoke with him about *Utshob*—its ghosts, its griefs, and the

too far. They abuse that control. That doesn't make it okay. I don't think there's a black or white answer here. But we shouldn't excuse him. We can still feel for him, though. Remember, in the end, Jasmine says, "You did this crime to me in cold blood." And Jahangir answers, "And I got the lifetime punishment too."

Your storytelling reminded me of *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Vonnegut—fragmented, non-linear, showing life in pieces rather than in order. Was that structure hard to write? Did it challenge you emotionally or creatively?

Not at all, actually. We didn't set out to be non-linear just for the sake of form. The structure came naturally because we followed emotions, not timelines. For us, the core was Jahangir's realisation—his memories, his regrets. It was more about how much emotional weight a moment carried. So you might go from his future to his past marriage to the present—all based on what he's remembering or feeling.

for example, is very close to me. He had nothing to lose. His mother died, his father left, his brother was broken. He did everything right but still ended up alone. I understand that feeling.

So yeah, there's no direct insert of "Shadhin equals Jahangir" but the guilt, the regret, the way people destroy what they love out of fear, I am scattered in all of them.

There was a full disclaimer on the film: "This movie is not allowed to be watched without family." And I couldn't stop thinking about your father. I know he passed away not too long ago, and I didn't even know if I should bring it up. Because...

Because you never know how or where you might strike a nerve. Someone else asked me this after the film came out, and I kept thinking about it. Honestly, I don't know how to answer this. I really don't. My father passed away before *Utshob* was released. I had thought about dedicating the film to him—it felt like the right gesture at the time. But when the moment came, I didn't do it. I decided to let that memory stay where it is. I didn't want to turn that absence into a line. I didn't want to decorate it.

There's something about grief that doesn't want to be translated. So I left it untouched. It lives with me, though. But the work continues. And sometimes, that's all you can do when grief doesn't move with you.

The film doesn't lack anything—it's funny, it's tragic, it's introspective. And somehow, nothing feels overdone. Does that emotional balance come naturally to you? Or do you have a process? A ritual? Maybe a place where the emotions unfold while you write?

I wish I could say there's a ritual or a process, but honestly, it's just about trusting my instincts. I spend a lot of time procrastinating, thinking, rewriting scenes in my head. I don't rush to type. And then suddenly, the emotion clicks and the scene comes. I remember the scene between Jahangir and his daughter where he says something completely unexpected—almost ridiculous—and the whole theatre laughs. But the interesting thing is, it wasn't meant to be funny, but honest. I knew it was a strange line, but I trusted that it belonged there. And people respond to honesty, especially when they're laughing.

So yeah, I think balance comes from not trying to over control the tone. It's about keeping things true to the emotional logic of the character. If a moment feels too poetic, I may let it flow. But if a scene gets too heavy, I let it stumble. If something feels unnatural, I cut it even if I liked the line. It's like cooking. You keep tasting while it simmers. You don't dump all the spices at once.

Do you believe that people carry their regrets forever? Or do you think it's possible to really, fully change after hurting others?

I think about regret a lot. And whenever I do, I feel like I'll carry it forever. Even if I live another 40 years—it doesn't matter. That regret doesn't shrink. It stays. For me, it feels like capital punishment.

What people don't realise is, the hardest part of remorse isn't saying it out loud. It's how slowly your body digests it. You go through something intense—some crisis—and then immediately try to act normal again. But you haven't processed anything. You've just bandaged it. That's when it gets dangerous. You start hurting people again, thinking the worst is over. But it isn't. You can't just flip a switch and expect the people around you to adjust to your sudden clarity. They didn't sign up for this, you know?

Lamia Sultana Kakon is a journalist, fiction writer, poet, and translator. She is currently a tutor in English Language Research at Independent University, Bangladesh. Reach her at: kakonsultana1908@gmail.com.



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

difficult mercy of looking again.

The three ghosts that arrive to "fix" Jahangir's life at the last moment—under the name CGPA—felt almost symbolic to me. As if they're here to raise the CGPA of his life before it's too late. Was that just playful, or was there a deeper layer? Why do they help people like Jahangir? What do they truly represent?

It's actually interesting that you noticed that. A lot of people didn't.

Most of the chaos we create comes from our failure to read the neutrality of a situation. We enter moments carrying separate films in our heads, and a small misunderstanding snowballs. In *Utshob*, that snowball rolls through time. In our stream of experience, the past, present, and future all overlap. We don't always know which one is gripping us.

The ghosts, then, aren't omens. They're not curses. They're prompts. Their presence isn't eerie—it's corrective. A call to re-read the moment, to try again. The film doesn't offer them as rewards, and it doesn't pretend Jahangir is worthy in the conventional sense.

In your opinion, was Jahangir a bad person for hiding his wife's admit card? Or was it just raw human insecurity? Should we judge him, or feel for him?

I don't think he's a "bad" person. I think he's human. And when people who've felt powerless for too long finally feel in control, they often go

That's how memory works. When we look back on our lives, we don't think in sequence. We remember by charge, not chronology. And because we were working from that emotional centre, the writing wasn't difficult in a technical sense. It was fluid. The challenge wasn't how to write it—it was how deep we were willing to go.

What, in your eyes, was Jahangir's fatal mistake, his hamartia that left him alone, was it simply stinginess, or something larger?

I think his stinginess is just a surface symptom of something deeper. His real fatal flaw is control. It's the way he tries to assert power over the only thing left in his life: people.

Jahangir is a man who had no control for most of his life. He lost his parents, his brother, his sister—he was powerless. And then suddenly he has a family, a wife, a daughter—and he starts to believe, "This time, it's mine." That's when he starts clinging, becoming controlling, and hoarding. It's not just money. It's emotional tightness.

In a way, that stinginess is capitalism at its most personal. We live in a society where it's okay to be miserly—emotionally and financially. We treat relationships like assets. And Jahangir starts to see people as extensions of himself—as things he can manage.

Do you personally relate to any of the characters in *Utshob*? Is there a piece of Shadhin in Jahangir, or someone else?

Not one character, but fragments. I see parts of myself in multiple people across the film. Joy,

POETRY

Durga

SNATA BASU

In the hush—footsteps fill the laden streets,
grasshoppers teeth to return home. Veiled divine mother,
she blooms in shards—from under the rain
from beyond the fallow moon
in her lion's gait... tidal sorrow pushing through
your swallowing metropolitan heap.
a residue, an imprint,
Something true lost in process, something found within;
a fractured, ceramic deity doll recoils,
her hurt spreads thin. Into a trident
a discus
a conch, a spear.
Steed beneath her chariot of flesh
her raven locks soar in black air;
This is a mounting vision in the heath
smudged clean
by her long, cascading armour-limbs.
in the trail of mist she devours—a thousand feline shadows
march in cold respite. this is a sacred call to the earth:
she asks you to take notice,
to remember the bare joy of becoming
to relent
in your raw, pulsing armour.

Snata Basu is a writer based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her poetry has appeared on numerous literary platforms including The Opiate, Visual Verse: An Online Anthology of Art and Words, and Small World City.

DESIGN: MAHMUDA EMDAD

POETRY

Inheritance Of luck

NUBISHA RABYA TOPOTE

I train myself not to meet their eyes—
those begging at corners,
those dragging rickshaws swollen with bodies,
those bartered like cattle,
sold into brothels where flesh has a price.
I look at everything else—
billboards, dust and the indifferent sky—
as if distraction could bury the question,
"what chance kept me from their place?"
Was it mercy, or accident?
Or is it only ego,
whispering that I am safe—
while blindness lets me walk unbroken
through their hunger?

Nubisha Rabya Topote, a class 10 student at Viqarunnisa Noon School and College, is a budding poet who finds inspiration in every opportunity to write. Find more of her work @ nubishawrites.

Spooktober

BHOOTER ADDA

Email us your spooky submissions for this month's Khero Khata prompt, 'Bhoooter Adda', at dsleditor@gmail.com.

Submission categories:

- Flash fiction or poetry (500 words)
- Two-sentence horror

Deadline: Oct. 20, 2025