

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* (2024), which seemed to be a loose adaptation of the novella *A Christmas Carol* (1843) by Charles Dickens.

Beyond production, Shadhin spent four years as 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.

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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?

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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, 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.

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