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## Formal Innovation and Political Criticism in a Bangladeshi Alternative Film

Naadir Junaid<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Rarely do we see innovative use of complicated filmic techniques in commercially-motivated films, because in order to maximize profit commercial filmmakers always incorporate specific audience-pleasing elements which serve to amuse and entertain the spectators. By providing glamour and gaudiness, larger than life heroes, unrealistic solutions of social problems, and theatrical acting entertainment-based films hardly enable the spectators to critically perceive the roots of contemporary social and political problems. Rather, these films seem to offer temporary escape from the troubles and tensions of contemporary reality. Mainstream films thus often turn out to be status-quoist films. Films produced outside the commercial film industry are referred to as alternative films. Unlike mainstream commercial cinema, alternative films are often made on a shoestring budget, and they do not draw on formulaic storyline and glitzy filmic components in order to reach the lowest common denominator audience. Alternative filmmakers make conscious attempts to negate the principles and aesthetics of entertainment-based commercial cinema. Filmic forms of alternative cinema usually become experimental and artistically innovative, and these films often demonstrate a penchant for exposing and condemning social and political problems. Instead of giving the spectators the opportunity to passively immerse in the illusive world of cinema and lulling them into a false sense of security, alternative films

disturb the audience through a pitiless depiction of contemporary problems, thereby making them aware of various forms of social injustice. In order to qualify as an alternative film, therefore, a film needs to be different from commercial cinema both in terms of form and political approach. This paper intends to argue that a film can be considered as an alternative film only when it radically departs from the filmmaking norms of commercial cinema. Since the independence of Bangladesh, films have been produced in this country outside the dominant film industry. But only a handful of Bangladeshi films demonstrate a willingness to experiment with filmic forms and to confront urgent social and political issues. This paper examines how *Ghuddi*, a film made by Bangladeshi director Syed Salahuddin Zaki deploys aesthetically innovative form and provides political criticisms, and in doing so qualifies as an alternative film.

### Introduction

Film form plays a crucial role to mark the distinctions between mainstream and alternative films. Commercial cinema prioritizes financial profit and therefore attempts are seen in commercial films to use cinematic techniques which only amuse and entertain vast numbers of people. Satyajit Ray once succinctly described the typical ingredients of a commercial Hindi film:

Colour (Eastman preferred); songs (six or seven?) in voices one knows and trusts; dance – solo and ensemble – the more frenzied the better; bad girl, good girl, bad guy, good guy, romance (but no kisses); tears, guffaws, fights, chases, melodrama; characters who exist in a social vacuum; dwellings which do not exist outside the studio floor; locations in Kulu, Manali, Ooty, Kashmir, London, Paris, Hong Kong, Tokyo... who needs to be told? See any three Hindi films, and two will have all the ingredients listed above (Ray, 1976: 90-91).

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<sup>1</sup> Naadir Junaid, PhD is an Associate Professor in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. *Email:* naadir.junaid@gmail.com

Average commercial films produced both in India and Bangladesh these days are still drawing on these specific elements pointed out by Satyajit Ray four decades ago. Commercial films of Hollywood also employ stereotypical formal devices such as linear narrative, action-packed melodrama, flamboyant heroes, and happy endings showing the triumph of the good over the evil. If sometimes social problems are disclosed and criticized in a commercial film, the criticism hardly makes an impact on the audience because such a film for the most part highlights pleasurable components. Social criticism in commercial cinema thus fails to be sharp and incisive because a commercial film mainly aims to provide the spectator with pleasure instead of making him conscious of oppression, exploitation and corruption of contemporary society.

While the directors of commercial cinema rarely demonstrate an interest to discard clichéd and unimaginative filmic techniques, alternative filmmakers emphasize experimentation with filmic forms. Innovative film language is one of the main traits serving to differentiate alternative cinema from profit-driven commercial films. An alternative film bears the stylistic signature of its creator and the distinctive formal characteristics used in one director's film distinguish his style from the styles preferred by other directors. Most celebrated Bengali film directors Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen made films at the same decades and dealt with social problems of the same city. But the distinctive stylistic attributes of their films showed their individual personality and revealed their unique approach to the same problems. Thus, their films produced at the same time became completely different from each other's in terms of form. In the realm of cinema, the directors exhibiting their self-expression and originality through the use of imaginative filmic forms are considered as authors analogous to a novelist or a poet. A theory known as the auteur theory highlighting a creative film director emerged in the 1950s and soon became widely influential. In his 1948 essay "Birth of a New Avant-Garde: The Camera-Pen," French novelist and filmmaker Alexandre

Astruc equated a filmmaker with a painter or a poet, and thus his essay prefigured the auteur theory.

By associating camera with a pen Astruc stressed that "the director was no longer merely the servant of a preexisting text (novel, screenplay) but a creative artist in his/her own right" (Stam, 2000: 83). In 1954, one of the most prominent directors of French New Wave cinema movement François Truffaut also advocated the filmmaker's status as an author in his famous essay "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" published in the reputed French film journal *Cahiers du cinéma*. Denouncing the unoriginal and formulaic stylistic attributes of French dominant cinema, Truffaut put forward the idea of a new film which "would resemble the person who made it, not so much through autobiographical content but rather through the style, which impregnates the film with the personality of its director" (Stam, 2000: 84). Film critics who used to write regularly in *Cahiers du cinéma* strongly promoted the idea of auteurism in the 1950s. Some of these critics such as Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol later became important figures of French New Wave Cinema. Innovative forms of their films served to signal distinctive stylistic signatures of these directors. For the proponents of the auteur theory, an auteur's film is significantly different from the films made by the metteurs-en-scène. The mise-en-scène (the organization of the contents of the frame) of an auteur's film always displays creativity, whereas metteurs-en-scène do not dispense with conventional and clichéd filmic methods and they simply translate a screenplay instead of making the mise-en-scène original and aesthetically innovative (Stam, 2000: 85).

In addition to innovative form, condemnation of social and political problems is also regarded as an important component of an alternative film. In their revolutionary manifesto "Towards a Third Cinema," Argentinian filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino classify cinema into three categories. First Cinema, according to them, is the entertainment-based mainstream films produced in dominant film industries such as Hollywood. They

describe First Cinema films as spectacles and “surplus value” cinema which aim to turn the spectators into “passive and consuming object” (Cited in Martin, 1997: 42). Solanas and Getino argue that instead of encouraging the notion of active spectator, First Cinema makes the spectator a consumer of bourgeois philosophy. The Argentinian directors consider artistic films produced throughout the world as products of Second Cinema. Certain artistic and avant-garde films only prioritize experimentation with film forms and attempts are not made in such films to come to terms with contemporary problems. These films demonstrate the directors’ ability to use the imagination to create new and original film techniques. But very often they shy away from dealing with social problems and thus they fail to raise people’s radical consciousness. Therefore, Solanas and Getino consider Second Cinema films as politically innocuous. For them, in order to provide real alternatives to profit-driven, status-quoist cinema, it is necessary to make films “that the System cannot assimilate and which are foreign to its needs, or making films that directly and explicitly set out to fight the System” (Cited in Martin, 1997: 42). The Argentinian directors define films possessing such traits as Third Cinema films. These films, according to their proponents, do not simply illustrate social problems, but they provide scathing criticisms of social injustices and political oppressions and thus serve to decolonize the minds of the spectators. Solanas and Getino and other theorists of Third Cinema did not prescribe any particular style for Third Cinema films. But Third Cinema always counteracts conventions of commercial cinema, and therefore most Third Cinema films generally employ innovative formal means. Any formal devices can be used in Third Cinema, but Third Cinema’s intent always remains different from conventional cinema. If typical First Cinema elements are used in Third Cinema, filmmakers change those components in a way that they offer political criticisms instead of providing mere entertainment.

Both Second and Third Cinema films are regarded as alternative films, but all alternative films do not qualify as Third Cinema or politically-critical cinema, because some alternative films display Second Cinema attributes. Therefore, the difference between a political film and an artistic film becomes evident. Artistic films are formally-innovative, but they do not always address political subjects. In contrast, a film aspiring to become political must have an explicitly political subject matter, and it should also use unorthodox formal elements. In their influential essay “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” French film scholars Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni argue that the reality represented in conventional cinema turns out to be a depiction preferred by the system. According to them,

What the camera in fact registers is the vague, unformulated, untheorized, unthought-out world of the dominant ideology... Once we realize that it is the nature of the system to turn the cinema into an instrument of ideology, we can see that the film-maker’s first task is to show up the cinema’s so-called ‘depiction of reality.’ If he can do so there is a chance that we will be able to disrupt or possibly even sever the connection between the cinema and its ideological function (cited in Nichols, 1976: 25).

In their essay, Comolli and Narboni divide films into seven different categories. They discuss a category in which ideological assimilation are subverted by the films on the levels of both content and form. These films include an overtly political content, and they “do not just discuss an issue, reiterate it, paraphrase it, but use it to attack the ideology” (cited in Nichols, 1976: 26). For Comolli and Narboni, films only become politically useful if they are “linked with a breaking down of the traditional way of depicting reality” (quoted in Nichols, 1976: 26). Thus, the French film scholars underline the importance of presenting a socially-critical message through the use of unconventional filmic techniques. Such films correspond to the politically-committed films which tend to reject the principles of commercial cinema both in terms of subject matter and style.

In Bangladesh, filmmakers in different decades made films outside the dominant film industry. However, an alternative cinema movement à la Indian New Cinema, Brazilian Cinema Novo, or French New Wave Cinema never emerged in Bangladesh. In different decades, individual filmmakers such as Alamgir Kabir, Sheikh Niamat Ali, Tanvir Mokammel, Morshedul Islam, Tareque Masud, Abu Sayeed, Nasiruddin Yousuff, Golam Rabbani Biplob made full-length feature films rejecting certain fundamental norms of mainstream cinema. This paper will analyze the content and style of Syed Salahuddin Zaki's *Ghuddi* (1980) in order to understand how a Bangladeshi film produced outside the dominant film industry demonstrates formal innovation and aspires to become socially-critical by denouncing contemporary social and political problems.

### ***Ghuddi*: An Aesthetic of Opposition**

Syed Salauddin Zaki's maiden feature *Ghuddi* (1980) displays the director's intention to depart thematically and stylistically from tradition. Although the film has a linear narrative, the deployment of unorthodox formal elements and acerbic comments on political reality makes the film significantly different even from other contemporary alternative films produced in Bangladesh in the 1970s. During the East Pakistani period and also during the first decade following the independence of Bangladesh, only a handful of Bangladeshi directors made films negating the stylistic attributes of conventional cinema such as linear narrative progression, predictable ending of the story, absence of complicated film techniques, and the use of exaggerated emotion in acting. In his important politically-oriented film *Jiban Theke Neyo* (Glimpses from Life, 1970), Zahir Raihan used certain stylistic elements of conventional cinema. However, he provided courageous political statements through the use of a metaphorical storyline which made *Jiban Theke Neyo* entirely different from other Bengali films made in East Pakistan until that time. In independent Bangladesh in the 1970s, Bengali alternative film directors rarely confronted contemporary political problems and they did not even try to

provide trenchant political criticisms through the deployment of allegorical narratives. In the 1970s, only a few films made by Alamgir Kabir (*Dheere Bohe Meghna*, *Shurjokonna*, *Rupalee Shoikote*) enabled film viewers to see formal experimentation in Bangladeshi cinema. In these films, Kabir provides direct political statements and sometimes he refers obliquely to long-standing social problems.

*Ghuddi* turns out to be different from contemporary Bangladeshi films because of its deployment of unorthodox cinematic techniques and the director's intention to come to terms with contemporary socio-political circumstances. Like the films of Alamgir Kabir, the success of *Ghuddi* was impressive too in enabling the spectators to watch a formally-innovative and socially-critical film. In fact, *Ghuddi* provides the spectators with certain ingredients that are not seen in the films of Alamgir Kabir. Various scenes of contemporary city are shown frequently in *Ghuddi* and so Dhaka seems to appear as a separate character in the film. Such frequent portrayals of city scenes were not commonplace in Bangladeshi films made in the 1970s. The authentic depictions of city scenes lend *Ghuddi* a rare lifelike quality. In the film, the director often uses acerbic and mockingly scornful dialogues for providing political criticisms. Such sarcastic remarks used in the film also serve to distinguish *Ghuddi* from other contemporary Bangladeshi films.

In *Ghuddi*, the director's camera roams through the city streets, and it also enters the city shops, restaurants, narrow alleys of impoverished areas, courtyards of a five star hotel and a university, a cinema hall, the premises of National Memorial Monument, and the ruins of a castle in Sonargaon. These real locations serve to create an aura of authenticity in the film. We may think that the director consciously tries to create this aura in order to make the spectator realize that the film intends to confront contemporary circumstances and urgent problems. The protagonist of the film is a young male named Asad (the part of Asad is played by Bangladeshi actor Raisul Islam Asad). We hear one of his internal monologues in the film: "I was about twenty years old in 1971. Now I cannot say

how old I am!" *Ghuddi* was made after nine years of the Liberation War. Is this statement by Asad revealing? Does this indicate that the war has made a young man like him a lot older for his actual age? In *Ghuddi*, most of the characters have the real names of the actors performing these parts. The director's conscious use of this interesting technique once again serves to strengthen the film's connection with reality. Through another internal monologue of Asad in front of Savar National Memorial Monument, we come to know that Asad took part in the Liberation War of Bangladesh. Actor Raisul Islam Asad really joined the Liberation War. During the War in 1971, he was a member of the freedom fighters' guerrilla unit that operated in Dhaka city. The director's intention to establish a strong connection with reality again becomes evident when we see actor Nasiruddin Yousuff in a scene as Asad's close friend. In real life, Both Raisul Islam Asad and Nasiruddin Yousuff were the members of the same guerrilla unit in 1971. In the entire film, Yousuff is seen only once in this scene. The use of Asad's real name, his freedom fighter identity, and the presence of another freedom fighter Yousuf as his friend serve to strengthen the sense of authenticity in the film.

From the very first scene *Ghuddi* appears to employ unconventional cinematic techniques, signaling that the director consciously attempts to discard the traditional techniques commonly seen in commercial films. The very first sequence of the film turns out to be self-reflexive because it provides references to certain aspects of cinema. By foregrounding different aspects of the filmmaking process, a self-reflexive scene disrupts the spectator's passive immersion in the film's fictional world. Thus, self-reflexivity within a film serves to ensure the spectator's active engagement with the film's events. Through a mid-close up, the very first scene of *Ghuddi* shows an abstract painting on a wall. Soon we see the hand of a person in front of that wall, and the hand strikes a match. Now Asad enters the mid-close up frame; a cigarette is seen dangling from his lips. But the match stops from burning before he lights his cigarette. That is the last match in the box and Asad throws the empty matchbox away. Asad then asks his friend to pass

a cigarette lighter on to him. Taking the lighter in his hand, Asad presses it but does not light the cigarette. In a close-up, we see the small flame produced by the lighter is glowing steadily in front of Asad's face.

"Hey what are you doing? Do you think I don't need money to purchase gas for the cigarette lighter?" – shouts the angry owner of the cigarette lighter seeing Asad wasting the gas of the lighter. But Asad pays no heed to his friend's scolding. He only chuckles, and takes time to light the cigarette. Then he explains his behavior to his friend by saying "acting, my dear friend, this is acting!" Now Asad takes a cinematographer's posture by stretching his arms out straight, and he slowly walks towards his friend. We see Asad's face between his arms. As he moves forward and passes the camera, his friend's face gradually becomes visible between Asad's arms. Asad starts telling his friend about a scene he watched in a film: "I cannot remember the name of the movie. A woman, a face, and a cigarette... she presses the lighter, but does not light her cigarette... she keeps staring at the flames... what an expression! And then, she looks at the man and her gaze remains fixed on his face.... This is acting at its best!" After praising the performance of this actor with great enthusiasm, Asad bitterly ridicules the poor and unimpressive performance of Bangladeshi cinema actors whom he describes as "our heroes."

This sequence also shows that Asad's friend runs a laundry business and Asad pays him a visit in his laundry store. Soon we see Asad borrows a shirt from the store despite the disapproval of his friend. Asad says to his friend: "I am wearing it today, and I promise to return it tomorrow." The first sequence of the film thus provides us with a number of information. We understand that Asad is unemployed, and he has a carefree attitude. We also come to know that he is educated and he possesses an interest in serious art. His aversion to shallow, conventional and lowbrow cultural products also becomes evident through his comments. The abstract painting on the wall behind Asad serves to symbolize his taste for works of artistic merit. In a later scene, we also see him reciting a few lines

from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The description of a film sequence watched by Asad, Asad's act of imitating the pose of a cinematographer, and the mention of film acting insert certain aspects of cinema within a cinema. Thus, from the very first sequence the director tries to interrupt the spectator's passive involvement with the film. Asad's caustic comments about the poor acting of local actors also demonstrates the director's intention to criticize attributes of conventional films produced in our country.

The attempts of critiquing entertainment-based and glitzy commercial cinema are recurrently seen in the film. The second sequence of the film shows Asad travelling by a rickshaw wearing the shirt he just borrowed from his friend's shop. He seems to be in a very jolly mood. We hear another internal monologue of Asad: "I am passionate about becoming a hero. But should I become a hero in the realm of politics, or should I become a star of the screen?" The frequent use of internal monologues also makes *Ghuddi* different from other contemporary Bangladeshi films. Suddenly Asad jumps from the rickshaw into the street and stands in front of a car approaching from behind, making the car stop with the screech of the brakes. Asad's jump reminds us of the clichéd actions frequently performed by film stars in entertainment-based cinema. But soon it becomes clear that the director does not use this shot in order to provide the spectator with entertainment, rather he intends to draw the spectator's attention to this particular device commonly used in action-packed commercial cinema. Flinging out his arms in a dramatic gesture, Asad asks the man sitting on the driver's seat: "How do you like the acting? I just performed like a dashing hero!" We understand that the car owner happens to be a friend of Asad and he mockingly replies to Asad: "Dashing hero, or an ox?" The director thus tends to deride the practice of using flashy techniques in conventional cinema. This friend gives Asad a lift, and at one stage he parks his vehicle in the car park of a five-star hotel. In the car park, Asad meets Ghuddi (Subarna Mustafa), a student of architecture in the Engineering University. Ghuddi comes from a well-off family. Asad seems to fall in love with Ghuddi the

moment they meet. And from that moment onwards, he begins lying to Ghuddi. When Ghuddi fails to get her car started, Asad gives her a lift by his friend's car pretending that he is the owner of this car. Instead of telling Ghuddi his real name, Asad says that his name is Mohabbat Ali. Ghuddi also seems to like Asad. In a later sequence, Ghuddi is seen conversing with one of her friends over telephone. She is seen telling her friend about Mohabbat. Referring to her experience of meeting Mohabbat, Ghuddi says that it was love at first sight.

Although the director incorporates a much-used device such as romantic relationship, *Ghuddi* hardly resembles a traditional entertainment-based film because of the use of specific filmic techniques. We observe various references to cinema even in the scenes showing the conversation between Asad and Ghuddi. Once they meet each other in the cinema, Asad says that their sudden meeting seems like a fictional event shown in a movie. During her telephone conversation, Ghuddi describes her meeting with Mohabbat as a film-like event. She also says that it is not bad as the beginning of a film. Then she looks directly at the camera, and says "hit!" As she makes this comment about the success of a film by looking directly at the camera, the spectator may think whether she is mentioning the success of *Ghuddi*. In the film, we also observe other instances of indirectly referring to *Ghuddi*. One day on the outskirts of Dhaka, Asad and Ghuddi are seen pushing their car as it is having an engine trouble. While they are pushing the car, Asad starts singing a song. The following scene shows them sitting inside a forest, and they are chatting with each other. A soft, romantic tune is heard as background music in this scene. After returning to the city, Asad describes his experience to one of his friends who is an industrialist: "The car experienced an engine trouble, so we pushed the car. I also performed a song, I heard a song, and when I was talking to her I felt that I was lost to the world."

"So you pushed the car? And did you run? And you performed a song? Did you fight too? Well, I must give you the lessons now to become a hero" – the comments made by Asad's friend indicate the

stereotypical elements which the commercially-motivated films always incorporate in order to maximize profit. Asad's industrialist friend now takes Asad to a studio where a shooting takes place. It seems that Asad's friend is the producer of this film. Describing the interest shown by many new producers in using their money for making films in newly-independent Bangladesh, Alamgir Kabir writes: "Because of the war and general state of lawlessness prevailing in the country a handful of people had accumulated massive wealth. Film industry was considered by them the most suitable sector to invest their 'capital' as no other sector would offer such easy immunity from possible official censure. It also offered a golden opportunity to make 'black' money 'white' " (Kabir, 1979: 53). We may suspect that Asad's wealthy friend is one of such producers who is investing his money in the film industry. During the sequence, we see movie camera and the cinematographer, the director and his assistants standing near the camera, the lighting equipment, the female protagonist dancing in front of the camera, and we frequently hear words like 'cut' and 'action.' Thus, the director of *Ghuddi* makes the spectator watch the shooting of a film within his own film. Therefore, *Ghuddi* becomes fully self-reflexive and it repeatedly reminds the spectator that filmmaking is a real event, thereby breaking the illusion created by the fictional events of the film.

Another sequence shows Asad and Ghuddi visiting the ruins of a castle in Sonargaon. The young couple beaming with energy and enthusiasm stands in sharp contrast to the decrepit castle, and this contrast appears to symbolize the difference between the true identities of Asad and Ghuddi and what they are actually pretending to have. Ghuddi apparently looks content and happy, but now she reveals her inner sadness: "It seems I am confined in a palace surrounded by high walls. And the information about the glee and gloom of the outside world never reach me because of these walls. The gems I have hardly bring happiness for me. They seem similar to the stones of these walls." Seeing Ghuddi disclosing her melancholic feelings which exist behind her veneer of cheerfulness, Asad tends

to reveal his real identity indirectly through metaphors: "Beware warrior. You are wearing clothes borrowed by your ancestors. Strip off these clothes, and let the scorching rays of the hottest month touch your black skin. Otherwise, they will turn you into a mere puppet to control you." We hear a melancholic yet fast piano tune on the soundtrack and such musical accompaniment adds to the profundity of the scene. The sequence bears resemblance to a European art cinema scene, and the other alternative films made in Bangladesh until that time barely incorporate such a scene.

The following sequence once again shows the conversation between Asad and his industrialist friend. The friend comments about Asad's recent experience in the ruins of the Sonargaon castle: "No, it does not sound good. The mass audience will not understand it. You made it really difficult for them. The sound coming from the dilapidated walls, smell, the captive princess, the savior prince, the black skin... No, it won't work." Through this dialogue the director points out the strong dislike displayed by commercial cinema producer and spectator for serious and thought-provoking ingredients in a film. The director makes clear that he deliberately incorporates complicated cinematic techniques and serious dialogues in *Ghuddi* in spite of knowing that the mass audience would not like the film's departure from tradition. The director also demonstrates that a film can go against the grain in spite of using a few commercial cinema elements. But in order to make the film unorthodox it is necessary to sufficiently transform those elements frequently employed in conventional cinema.

In a scene Asad lightheartedly tells Ghuddi: "Are we performing in a film that we need to worry about censorial cuts? Life is like a play, and in this particular play nothing is censored." Such frequent references to various aspects of cinema within a film provide the spectator with jolts and they serve to disturb the immersion of the spectator in the narrative. Thus, such techniques turn out to be examples of *Distanciation Effect* introduced by Marxist playwright Bertolt Brecht. Certain scenes showing Asad and Ghuddi provide the director's analyses of contemporary political reality and his political

criticisms. When Ghuddi places flowers on the National Martyrs' Monument in Savar, we see Asad standing a few yards away. His ever-smiling face looks grim. We may suspect these shots are showing the unfortunate distance between the freedom fighters and the fruits of independence in the liberated country. A long shot shows Ghuddi taking photographs of the martyrs' monument, and Asad is seen standing behind her. Ghuddi is photographing the memory of the Liberation War of 1971. But she is unaware of the fact that a freedom fighter is standing behind her. When she is done with taking photos, she asks Asad where he was during the War. In the independent country, the War of Liberation seems like a framed photograph and a freedom fighter is unknown and ignored in this society.

Soon we come to know of Asad's thoughts through his internal monologue: "Actually I have been searching for something. I looked for it in the shattered remains of 1971 and in today's mansions symbolizing fame, power and wealth. But what have I been looking for? I took part in the War; I was a freedom fighter. But am I free now?" But the film suggests that Asad is not free in contemporary society. Ghuddi's father Mr. Hasan (Hasan Imam) is not free too. In the 1950s, he was a leader of the Communist Party and now he is a person of wealth and influence. In a party at Mr. Hasan's house, Ghuddi's politically-conscious friend Tariq (Tariq Anam) criticizes Mr. Hasan vehemently for changing his ideological position. In reply to Tariq's harsh criticisms Mr. Hasan only said: "Now we are waiting to see when everything will degenerate and collapse. Our minds have already been degraded. It is like a prison created by us. Freedom seems so elusive."

The party scene becomes one of the important scenes of the film and the director provides overt political statements through this scene. In the party the apathy of others towards politics annoys Tariq. For him, some people in our society equate politics with hooliganism, and the others think only a privileged few are likely to succeed in the realm of politics. Tariq expresses his dissatisfaction about people's lack of political consciousness and their inability to

protest against political exploitation. He tends to criticize the political leaders: "An old shirt and it is badly torn. In 1947, the British made my father wear this shirt. And my father did not stop wearing it. He only tried to mend it. My father betrayed our trust... silently." For Mr. Hasan, such an unpleasant situation was inevitable because of the normal course of history. But Tariq retorts: "They distorted the historical truth deliberately. They only told us the history of the music room. You are still trying to make us accept the distorted history."

A few high-angle shots are used in this sequence. Thus, the party guests standing near the dining table look feeble and submissive as if they are incarcerated in this prison-like society. Their gloomy faces turn out to be indicative of their failure to change or strongly oppose the moral degeneration that exists in contemporary society. We see a print of Pablo Picasso's famous painting *Guernica* on the dining room wall. Picasso created this painting to condemn the killing of innocent civilians by military plane bombings during the Spanish Civil War. Mr. Hasan looks at this painting. The camera slowly pans and makes us see the painting in a close-up. Then we hear a voice-over narration. An unknown male voice states how attempts are made to hide the true history: "The history of the music room. It is the history of self-interest and moral debasement. History tells us about the rise of some people and the decline of others. But it is never written in history when the grains grown on paddy fields turn into gold and how the money is only used to enhance the gloss of the music room." During the voice-over narration, the camera pans and tilts over *Guernica* and we see different parts of the painting. While the narration draws our attention to social exploitation, we see the language of Picasso's protest against social injustice. This sudden voice-over narration by an unknown voice disrupts the linearity of the narrative and the spectator's immersion. Therefore, it creates a *distanciation effect* in the film. A technique namely explicit teaching method is often used in politically-critical films. Explicit teaching occurs when a character says something by directly addressing the spectator. It also takes



place when several characters are seen conversing, but the comments made by the characters appear like political statements and it seems that the comments are actually directed to the audience (Campbell and Cortes, 1979: 385). In the party scene, Tariq's critical comments can be regarded as examples of explicit teaching method.

Asad's borrowed shirts appear to be a symbol of inaction, passivity and lack of consciousness. We may think that this shirt borrowed from the laundry store is not different from the badly-torn shirt that others made us wear in the past. Wearing that shirt given by our former rulers we only started mimicking their attitudes instead of trying to achieve a belief in our own worth and dignity. Similarly, Asad's borrowed shirt made him ape the attitude of a wealthy individual. He tends to hide his real identity. In the film, Tariq is often seen wearing only a trouser and the upper part of his body is not covered by any clothes. Is this film treatment indicative of Tariq's greater political consciousness? When Ghuddi discovers Asad's real identity, then in a letter written to Tariq, Asad says: "I know Ghuddi comes to know that my clothes are not mine, they are borrowed. But underneath these outfits I am real; my love for her is genuine too."

Perceiving Asad's deep feelings for her, at the end of the film Ghuddi returns to Asad. Asad is far away from the city then. He lives near a river. From his words it seems he has found what he has been looking for in the city: "Here I do not see decrepit walls, red or blue books, or photographs of the leaders... I can enjoy the real rain." In the last sequence of the film, Asad is seen sitting on a boat with Ghuddi. He is not wearing a shirt; the upper part of his body is bare. It seems even in front of Ghuddi he does not require a borrowed shirt anymore. A shot of Asad's lighting a cigarette becomes a motif in the film. In the final sequence, Asad is once again seen trying to light his cigarette. But Ghuddi takes the cigarette from his lips and throws it away. The end of the film does not give us any information about Asad's future. Unlike the previous scenes, Asad cannot light his cigarette in the final scene, and so we

anticipate the director signals a change. May be the director suggests that Asad's temperament has changed and his new attitudes to life will enable him to experience freedom.

*Ghuddi* thus departs thematically and stylistically from tradition. In this film, Syed Salahuddin Zaki uses certain formal devices which were not commonplace in Bangladeshi cinema in the 1970s. *Ghuddi* appears to be more politically effective than the other contemporary alternative films made until that time because the director has made conscious attempts to experiment with form and to provide political critiques. *Ghuddi* thus comes under the rubric of alternative cinema. The director also makes clear that it is not necessary to make a film cerebral and artistically complicated in order to provide political statements.

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