In the arena of battle no warrior forgives

RITWIK GHATAK
Chapter IV

Film and Praxis

In Ghatak cinema becomes a conceptual unit that generates action within the film and creates a place for a similar praxis outside the film space. The film develops into an arena that generates a critique of the establishment from the margins as well as further critiques the form and dynamics of resistance in its varied changing forms. The space within cinema gradually begins to destabilise the centralizing forces of state formation that exist in their most internalized forms in the psyche of the individual, whether it is Geeta/Sanat in Meghe Dhake Tara, or Ramu the individual in Nagarik or Ishwar in Suberna Rekha or then Ali and Nayak in Yieh Quin. It is through the dissemination of the state nuclei that a victim becomes an instrument of his/her own victimization. This is the case, among other, with Ramu in Nagarik, Ishwar in Suberna Rekha, Nita in Meghe Dhake Tara and Ali and Nayak in Yieh Quin. The characters not only perpetuate their own victimization but also of other fellow victims. This critique is apparently developed through his major thematic concerns and arguments, through the delineation of the character situated within a specific milieu, and through his/her response to this milieu. But the form itself subtly turns subversive. Operating within the traditional, popular forms, it constantly questions forms of viewing by subverting the conventional cinematic codes and in the process creates a thought provoking cinema. The form implicates the spectator within the film space and demands that he/she take a stand vis-a-vis the contemporary crisis which, according to Ghatak, is capable of either leading towards the path of pure fascism or towards the Leninist modes of thinking, modes that will ultimately lead to a reworking of the
system from below. Hence, cinema in Ghatak becomes a call to the people on the periphery to rise in collective unison and to dismantle this cohesive power nexus that is subtly eroding their modes of resistance.

One of the significant thematic concerns in Ghatak's cinema is nationalism, its formation, significance and aftermath. Ghatak problematises it from a Marxist-Leninist perspective.

In the Marxist-Leninist framework imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism. Lenin saw imperialism as the final bastion of capitalism and felt that its downfall would in turn lead to the downfall of capitalism. Imperialism is caused by a situation of ever increasing profit in the developed capitalist countries which lacks space for productive investment within the constraints of production for private profit. This has led to monopolists and finance capital as well as international trusts which have divided the whole world among themselves. Thus, imperialism is marked by an ever increasing competition for markets and raw materials between the capitalist powers and by the division of the world into exploiting and exploited countries. The fight for market would lead to war, as would the fact that those powers which possessed colonies (i.e. captive market) would develop faster than the other capitalist countries and thus generate mutual rivalry.¹ Thus, imperialism would inevitably lead to war among the imperialist nations. Lenin considered that "... it is not only in newly opened up countries, but also in the old, that imperialism is leading to annexation, to increased national oppression, and, consequently, also to increasing resistance."² He thus believed that rebellion on the part of the native peoples was almost inevitable. Sooner or later it would be successful and the countries concerned would
gain their independence.

In the Marxist-Leninist world-view nationalism is not an end in itself. Rather, national assertion is one of the necessary struggles against a particular form of oppression and domination that will perhaps expedite the process of revolution. Further, struggle for a nation state is intrinsic to nationalism, for this alone can provide for sufficient political autonomy for the people to independently decide their future course of development-cultural, economic, social etc. However the nation state is not at variance with the interests of a bourgeoisie, and historically bourgeoisie have led the national demands in their struggle against feudalism for the establishment of bourgeois rule. Since theoretically bourgeois society is a progressive development over feudalism, hence national struggles pose themselves as a progressive change prior to revolution.

In this sense the national liberation movement forms one of the stages of revolution. Yet it is only one of the stages that has to be left behind; power has to pass to the native proletariat who in turn will unite with the proletariat of the world and destroy a system based on class and national configurations. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.³

Nowhere in his oeuvre does Ghatak refer to the issue of colonialism or even nationalism. Ghatak viewed the colonial master as a replica of the feudal landlord or the industrial master within the nation state. Similarly he felt that the process of deculturalisation of a people under colonialism is operative in a different form within a nationalist framework.
also. In this framework the people's culture is subjugated by the upper class/caste culture that eventually subsumes and thus eliminates it. This finds an explicit expression in the discussion between Panchanan Ustad and Jagannath, in Jukti Takko Ar Gappo. Panchanan Ustad calls the Brahmins 'malichas' (foreigners) who came and usurped the culture of the indigenous people.

Analyzing the formation and the aftermath of Indian nationalism, Ghatak questions its development. Nationalism became a cohesive force that consolidated and brought together different groups who otherwise would have worked contrary to each other. Under its banner they came to acquire a unitary base. Hence the conception of a monolithic state where all opposition based on class and religion would first tend to assimilate and then consolidate and centralize the power nexus is inherently an inevitable part of state formation that eventually subsumed the rebellion of nationalism into an uncritical conformity to the nation state in the form of patriotism. Thus, nationalism was merely a device of the bourgeois for projecting their class interests as the interests of the entire nation. It constituted an attempt to dampen the class consciousness of the proletariat by obscuring the conflicting class interests within each nation and by encouraging rivalry among the proletariat of various nations. Yet nationalism could be progressive if it could first turn anti-feudal and eventually lead to the political supremacy of the proletariat within a nation though later it had to turn international. Ghatak, following the Marxist stream of Indian nationalism, supported the Indian national movement as it represented the right of self-determination of India as a nation state. Yet fundamentally the Marxist stream stood above the notion of nationalism and struggled towards a class
consciousness. There were attempts to organize workers and peasant movements so that the national movement would develop an anti-feudal, class perspective and open the path for a socialist revolution. Moreover, the Marxist stream was in many respects different than the mainstream nationalism. The Marxists in the form of AIPWA and IPTA stood not only against the forces of fascism and imperialism but analyzed the structural formation of imperialism, colonialism and fascism. They further tried to situate the Indian freedom movement within the anti-colonial struggles throughout the world. Thus for the Indian Marxists working within the framework of the national struggle the most important aspect was to fight against the forces of imperialism by spreading a national awareness based purely on indigenous national culture. This national culture of the people was in no way homogeneous nor did the Marxist stream subscribe to the formation of a monolithic Indian state. Thus for the Marxists the desire for national liberation was organically tied to the desire for cultural liberation.

All through his oeuvre Ghatak questions the very basis of Indian nationalism which apparently took a stand against feudalism but eventually culminated in reformulating the feudal interests. Hence, he stood by the contention that the ideological premise of the national liberation movement betrayed the people as it misdirected them by diffusing their class interests; later the movement itself was betrayed its leadership in the acceptance and the signing of the Mountbatten Accord. Moreover it lacked a perspective. It was anti-British but did not fight against the processes of imperialism or feudalism and hence lacked a social and an economic base. Besides, nationalism is not fundamentally related to patriotism, for patriotism primarily seeks to align itself to a state whereas nationalism as it
constitutes a national consciousness could be anti the existing state as well. Within the Indian political scenario the subtle configurations that worked to submerge nationalism into patriotism were part of the politics related to the submergence of all opposition into the consolidation of a monolithic state. Moreover, patriotism became a tool in the development of the communal psyche that worked across the scenario of the partition of the nation and further consolidated the state power. For Ghatak, as for all other Marxists, a more significant question was related to the relations between the nations and the state rather than the relations among nations. That is primarily the reason why in almost all his films Ghatak questions the relation of Indian state to the people and depicts the oppression based on class discrimination within a nation state rather than on the development of the colonial psyche.

Thus Ghatak centralizes his cinema around three basic questions related to nationalism: the notion of nationalism, the formation of the Indian state and the implications of nationalism in the form of the Indian state in post independence India. The consequence of the formation of the Indian state once again is related to the formation of the refugee and to the issue of class displacement and the economic deterioration of the people.

Looking at the issue of Indian nationalism, Ghatak felt that the final phase of the Indian liberation movement was basically a sell-out. The national movement which was a people’s movement finally had succumbed to the power nexus and in the process the people along with the entire movement were betrayed. Ghatak strongly felt that if the national movement had sustained its struggle during its last phase as it had done for a number of years, the issue of the partition of the nation and the accord
with Mountbatten would have been absolutely redundant. In one of his interviews Ghatak explicitly states that the 1940s was a very significant era in the Indian freedom movement. It was the time when several movements were operating simultaneously. 1942 saw the uprising of the August movement, followed by the Naval revolt in Bombay, the Air Force revolt in Madras. The Britishers had tried to suppress the details about these rebellions but these revolts had completely jolted them. Hence this was the most crucial time for the continuation of protest. It was important at this moment to sacrifice a few more lives in order to sustain the vocal protest of the people. Had this happened the Britishers would have been compelled to leave. But the entire liberation movement was betrayed for power in the acceptance and the signing of the Mountbatten Accord. Like Ghatak the Marxist stream of Indian national struggle too felt that it was during the 1940s that the crisis of colonialism in India had intensified. This was the time of the Second World War and of the great famine in Bengal which subsequently gave a powerful boost to the liberation urge of the country. It was at this time that the imperialist forces realized that the old forms of exploitation would not work and so they hatched a scheme of taking a portion of capitalists of the country into partnership and then in the name of giving independence they changed their signboard and cadres and went underground in India.\(^5\) Hence the liberation movement was betrayed. Imperialism continued to survive but under the garb of the independent Indian state. It was merely that the form of imperialism had changed. The artists in IPTA strongly stood by the contention that not only did they not attain independence on 15 August 1947, but India got enmeshed in several new problems. The partition of the nation destroyed the economy and the culture completely. The entire industrial
organization was forcibly broken. A vast section of workers were
turned into destitutes. A particular section of the peasants,
artisans, small businessmen, lower middle class people were torn
apart by the partition. Food and cloth problems became severe as
inflation along with other consequences of war began to surface.
Instead of following the path of peaceful reorganization, the
country's economic policies were heading towards a newer crisis
and global war madness. The global economic crisis of Anglo-US
business was spreading its poisonous shadow. The Marxist stream
of Indian national movement demanded liberation from this
economic exploitation. It revolted against the idea of either
being a market or a commodity for the foreign capital and
demanded an independent national economy.

Related to nationalism is the issue of the partition of the
nation. Ghatak explores the genesis and the possibility of the
division of the nation across two significant planes: the signing
of the Mountbatten Accord and its acceptance by the people which
manifested itself in the communal riots that followed. It is
here that the dissemination of the state apparatus as localized
in the individual comes in. The question that Ghatak implicitly
poses across his cinema is: why was it that in 1905, when Curzon
gave a call for the division of Bengal, the entire nation rose as
one and made it absolutely impossible (the reference here is to
Kunal/Gagan's play in Komal Gandhar that refers to Curzon's
decision to divide Bengal and the 'Banga Bhanga' movement against
the partition) by generating non-co-operation and Swadeshi
movements through-out the nation, but then in 1947 (and the
reference here is to Ghatak's short film Yieh Quin) not only was
it accepted by the Indian National Congress but the entire nation
ran amok killing each other violently. How and what happened
between 1905 and 1947 to precipitate such violence? It is this
question that Ghatak explores in his short film *Yieh Quin*. The film problematises the notion of communalism, the subtlest form of state violence wherein the individual through the process of hegemony is convinced that he/she is fighting a personal war. Communalism thus even cuts across patriotism, as it creates divisions at such a deep seated level that individuals become the instrument of their own destruction and begin to align themselves with forces that basically are victimizing them. In *Yieh Quin*, Ghatak presents two close childhood friends, Ali and Nayak, who meet after a number of years in a very precarious situation amidst communal riots. They nostalgically recall the days when they had struggled for the independence of the nation and now bemoan the futility of this struggle. Amidst communal riots they try to save each other till they witness a grotesque death. It is at this moment that Ali and Nayak no longer remain individuals but become representatives of communalism. They suddenly become frightened of each other and in self-defence towards the end of the film they kill each other. Ghatak thus presents the fear psychosis operative during communal riots and depicts how deep seated the hegemonic processes are. The film subtly dissolves the notion of an individual and presents the reality of the system that constitutes an individual. Thus it was by using the instrument of communalism that India and Pakistan actually attained statehood and made possible the partition of the nation. State in the form of communalism not only speeded the process of the division of the nation but divided a single people. The result was division, which was not merely a geographical division but the division of a culture. It smashed the very roots on which a culture exists and inherently created rootlessness and hence moral degradation. Giving vent to this feeling Ghatak writes, "... on the eve of independence came the Hindu-Muslim
riots, and with independence, the partition of Bengal, dividing a single people with a common inheritance and leading to a mass migration that was to leave its scar on a whole generation of Bengalees."6 Ghatak further states that though twenty-five to twenty-seven years have passed historically yet one needs to vehemently oppose the division of Bengal as it was absolutely artificial and imposed. The issue of Bengal, he believed, was related to love and culture, and a single people despite all geographical and political boundaries cannot be divided. Hence the division of Bengal should not be accepted nor should one pardon or forgive it.

In Bari Theke Paliya he explicitly states through one of his characters, that some poet has said that if a child breaks a toy we get angry but here the country had been divided and cut into two and we did nothing about it. While commenting on his play Dolil, he writes, "... then with my own eyes I saw this 'Vastuhara', who had been compelled to leave everything, and I saw them seeking shelter, they became 'Sharatnathsi.' I simply could not endure to see this reduction."7 Ghatak reiterates this feeling in Komal Gandhar when the character from the first intertext states, "I have land and cattle, I am not a refugee." Throughout his cinema there is an attempt to demystify this aura of communalism and division and to state that a single people sooner or later will be reunited. Thus the formation of the state resulted in the formation of the refugee, a formation that apparently manifested itself in homelessness but at a deeper level resulted in the creation of an exile political as well as existential. While commenting on Suberna Rekha, Ghatak writes:

... the refugees pose the basic problem in Suberna Rekha but the problem of homelessness or rootlessness no more remains confined to the refugee from the partition. I extended it further as an important concept, very apt for the modern man uprooted from his traditional
It is the issue of the refugee both in terms of their formation as well as in terms of their varied states of constitution that Ghatak explores in his cinema.

Beginning with the refugee as the pavement dweller in *Bari Theke Paliye*, Ghatak presents the state of exile as a state of abandoning and of being abandoned. The attempt of the refugee here is to erase this state of alienation through the process of retrieving the lost in the form of memory. The state of the refugee in *Meghe Dhake Tara* moves in terms of class displacement and presents the refugee as a peripheral being moving on the margins. Problematizing the notion of the refugee in *Komal Gandhar*, Ghatak vehemently opposes the formation of the refugee and presents the 'exile' in terms of a desire to relocate and reunite. Continuing the discourse, Ghatak presents an existential state of the refugee in *Suberna Rekha* where the 'exile' is eventually presented in terms of culture and conviction and hence the self. The film culminates in the realization of self as nomad and is continued in *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* where the pavement dwellers of *Bari Theke Paliye* finally realize that the pavement is the new home in a state that is fundamentally against them. The 'exile' here is presented in search of the right political ideology which alone will erase this continuum of exile whether political, moral or existential.

Thus moving within the states of amnesia and memory, Ghatak presents the refugee as a victim of this independence which for its own vested interests created the arena of exile. On the one hand India attained independence and on the other parts of it became Pakistan. The space between the two independent states
became the space of the refugee, the displaced, of the homeless, of people who suddenly were compelled to make sacrifices for the formation of the nations. Ghatak presents the shadow of the exodus, that exists on the peripheral margins, as doomed to move perpetually in a state of disequilibrium wherein any state of settlement is merely a semblance. It is this notion of the exodus, both literal and metaphorical, that forms the essence of Ghatak's cinema. Literally beginning as a shadow in *Komal Gandhar*, the exodus moves across *Suberna Rekha* where even after twenty years of independence, the trains continue to carry the refugees. The exodus once again becomes a shadow in *Yieh Qui:* only to culminate in *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo*. Here the scattered exodus reunites in the form of Neelkantha, Banglabala, Jagannath and Nachiketa after twenty-six years of independence in an attempt to understand their plight so that the lost self could be relocated in a political ideology that would inevitably erase their dislocation economic, political and geographical.

In order to repress the spirit of uprising of the refugee (that is referred to in passing in the first sequence of *Suberna Rekha* where the refugees from East Bengal are presented as forcibly occupying land on the outskirts of Calcutta for a roof above their heads), the Indian state, like any other state, offered the model of legal transaction that involved a contractual type of exchange. Hence the idea of citizenship. As a compensation for the loss of its multiple identities the displaced was offered a single identity, that of an Indian citizen. The process of offering citizenship was a double edged sword: on the one hand it justified the partition of the nation and on the other hand by offering citizenship to the people the state apparatus sanctified itself. The displaced refugee became the citizen of free India merely on legal transaction. But what
kind of citizenship did India offer to its citizens? This is the question that Ghatak explores across his cinema, from *Nagarik* where he begins to formulate this question down to *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* where he directly confronts the Indian state and asks: what prospects does the Indian state offer its citizens? Through the delineation of reality in his oeuvre, Ghatak brings to the fore the state of unemployment, retrenchment and homelessness not merely because of the partition of the nation but also because of the anti-people model that the Indian state followed, a model that was characterized by constant economic deterioration that resulted in the ever degrading plight of the economically lower classes.

Beginning his oeuvre with *Nagarik*, Ghatak presents the story of unemployment and homelessness where the search for a job and consequently for a home becomes the ultimate search till the realization dawns that 'everyone around is another me.' *Nagarik* in a different form finds its replica in *Megha Dhaka Tara* where once again the struggle to survive in the face of an extreme economic crisis marked by unemployment and economic deterioration becomes the main issue. *Suberna Rekha* continuing this state presents characters who are compelled to compromise their convictions and who yet end in a desperate condition. *Bari Theke Paliye* and *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* both reiterate the theme of unemployment and homelessness and present the eventual economic degradation of India that can offer nothing to its people. The films end with the realization that the reduction of the people into the pavement dweller is inevitable in a system that survives through class discrimination and economic disparities.

The pavement dweller is thus a convergence both literal and metaphoric of class as well as of geographical displacement that
eventually results in psychic displacement. Living with splintered realities the people no longer are in a position to recollect and relocate themselves either in their past or in terms of their class perspective. Thus in almost all his films, Ghatak creates characters who are amnesiac of their past and of their closest relations. Is not this amnesia the most violent form of displacement? Living with this reality what does a refugee do? The option is either to follow the path of individual existence or to join hands with others who too are under the same situation and walk towards the path of revolution. It is this opposition between the collective and the individual that marks Ghatak’s cinema. The individual inevitably is eliminated by the system in his cinema hence most of his films end in death while the collective struggle of the people sustains. Only in Nagarik and in Komal Gandhar where the protagonists join the communist uprising do they survive. It is this notion of the national popular in the Gramscian sense of the term that Ghatak brings forth primarily in Nagarik where the citizen as a nation rises up and begins to question the state apparatus. The citizen acquires the status of an individual as a representative of the ‘collective will.’

But revolution does not mean mere action. Jukti Takko Ar Gappo as its name suggests is actually an argument between thought, action and praxis. Ghatak as Neelkantha in his dialogue with the Naxalites expresses his unease with the form that the Naxalite movement took and suggests that there is a need to rethink the form that the revolution must take. Quoting extensively from Marx, Lenin and Mao as well as referring to Regis Debray and Cheguevara and the Cuban revolution, Ghatak as Neelkantha concludes his argument in a state of utter confusion. But the film suggests, Neelkantha the cynic, though a must for
the revolution, must die, if society has to progress in the socialist way.

The entire cinema of Ghatak reflects a political odyssey that begins with Nagarik, situated as it is in the phase of B.T. Ranadive in the CPI, in 1951, the phase of left adventurism, and ends with Jukti Takko Ar Gappo, that critiques the most radical form of the ML movement. A political analysis of his cinema not only sketches the life-graph of a political film-maker but also reflects the changing scenario of left politics in India, especially in the context of the contradictions within the party politics (CPI), and the later phase of IPTA, its struggle for autonomy, its conflict with the CPI, the contradictions within the leadership and its final division and disintegration. Ghatak’s later films, especially Suberna Rekha, and his short story Janamabhumi, problematise the notion of activism as Yieh Kuin analyses the formation of the communal psyche. It is with Jukti Takko Ar Gappo that his political odyssey becomes complete as it questions the most radical forms of politics and demands a need for a praxis, a need to reformulate the Marxist ideology within the Indian context. Ghatak thus begins his political and cinematic life with complete clarity of the Marxist ideology and ends with the statement that reflects his utter confusion as well as a strong desire for a remoulding of the left ideology.

Nagarik, situated in the era of the Telengana uprisings, is the story of a citizen among other citizens who struggles hopefully to support his individual family until the realization dawns on him through Jatin babu, a fellow victim, that everyone around is "just another me." The story depicts an incessant deterioration of the middle class that is inevitable in the present era of industrialization. The film also analyses the
domain of patriarchal oppression in relation to Sita as a commodity scrutinized in the marriage market as well as in her final insistence to leave with Sagar, that develops her into a complete victim, both in terms of patriarchy, where a woman is always homeless as well as in terms of class as she is willing to take 'any port in the storm.' On the other hand the problematics of class as well as that of patriarchy are encompassed in Suli, who decides to sell herself as there are no options left. She clearly realizes that morality is nothing but an upper class luxury, that the poor have no choice. She tells Uma that whatever one has to do in order to live is good and that when women move out at night with powdered faces their scars are not visible to outsiders. Ghatak thus presents the two sides of the same coin when on the one hand, he presents women as would be brides through Sita available for sale in the marriage market, on the other he presents the blatant commodification of the female body through Suli entering the field of prostitution.

Nagarik formulates the cronotope of the street. It depicts people either as pavement dwellers or as moving towards the pavement under economic circumstances that are constantly being manipulated by the system. Towards the end, Nagarik states that all paths for the people will inevitably end in the slums and it is only then that they will dream a different kind of a dream, a dream to build a life along with and not isolated from the ordinary toiling masses.

The film brings to the fore the condition of unemployment, homelessness, retrenchment, inflation and the consequent increase in poverty. The narrative operates at two levels. At the central level is the story of Ramu, the individual, who throughout struggles hopefully for a job and a home. He along
with his mother is convinced that they will rise again and refuses to believe that life will always be like this. But Ramu's story is constantly subverted through the voice of Jatin babu, as well as that of the old father. They both are convinced that only by accepting the reality can one find a solution. The father warns Ramu to remove his blinkers, to dissociate himself from his false hopes which are a part of the hegemonic process through which a system operates, for only then will he be able to see the world open up before him. Only through the acceptance of the reality of the impending storm can one gather one's resources and collectively encounter it, he tells Ramu. It is only by accepting destruction can one build something new and that too not alone. The film states through Jatin babu that it is only by teaming up that one can survive. All individual dreams are false and will lead the people nowhere. Hence these dreams must be replaced by new collective dreams.

Throughout the film the characters experience the pain of being crushed under a millstone. They only dream the dream to find employment but realize that finding a job in the present era is like gambling. And yet it is expected that the poor cannot be lucky in the lottery. They are doomed to miss opportunities. As Jatin babu says, "all my life I have only missed chances." And those who are employed work but on their "heads hangs the sword of retrenchment." The characters feel that they too, like the rich, get tired and deserve rest and security but unlike the rich they do not get it. They are crumbling like a sandbank but they are unaware and wonder if a new land is being built anywhere. This feeling of being crushed and choked is objectified through the sound of the hammer-strokes that persists in the film. It signifies the hard realities of existence, "that teaches lessons to people through a thousand and one hammer-strokes." And
probably these alone will break their illusions and demand a rebellion from them. The characters know that there is no break, no escaping from the grind that is crushing them unless and until they take some desperate plunge.

_Nagarik_ makes it explicit that the problem of unemployment is related to the capitalist mode of competition. Even if Ramu gets a job, he knows that he will be depriving others by accepting it. Developed in the Marxist mode, _Nagarik_ subverts illusions of cultural morality and states through the landlord that the world operates on the principle of economic relations and commercial transactions. It is only by maintaining them that one can preserve the world as a single family and find that all are brothers and sisters.

The film brings to the fore the contradictions of the system when through Sagar it states that although India is the richest in the world in mineral resources, yet strangely there is so much of poverty here. It ends with the realization that there is no escape. And since everyone is finally going to end in the same place, that is the slums, then why this separation? Further in the process, the film states that the people will inevitably have to leave many things behind including their individual dreams and aspirations. Since there is no escape, one has to live to change one's life by holding on with both hands. This is the only history, _Nagarik_ makes explicit, the process of giving birth to something new, howsoever painful the process may be. "Writhing in pain the mother may think that death is coming," says Ramu towards the end of the film, "but it is life, a fresh new life that makes its way through pain." The narrative voice of the film comments: "Under the steel bridge so much of water is flowing to the ocean, and some day, in some new hour the people
will rise in collective unison". The way is being prepared, states Ghatak; just as the water of the river Ganges is constantly, silently, rather suavely flowing to meet the ocean somewhere, similarly the life of the city Calcutta is also following the winding weary trek to meet somewhere, someday, somehow the ocean.10

The film towards its end dislodges itself from Ramu's story by stating that, that is another story. The main story is the question, 'What is the journey towards?' The tale is the tale of such a development in the city of Calcutta as the arena of class struggle where for better or for worse, Ramu's declassment has begun. But the endless march continues, other people, other hopeful dreamers will probably step into Ramu's shoes and dream unattainable dreams. But sooner or later their declassment will begin like Ramu's. They too will end up in the slum, inhabited not by educated dreamers but by the simple working people who in spite of their sufferings, are trying remorselessly to build a new life.11

_Nagarik_ thus upholds the Marxist ideology prevalent during the CPI phase in 1951-52. The film, as Ghatak himself states, was a co-operative venture. Nobody he writes, asked for any money, for the laboratory, or for the studio. Even the raw stock was given to him free of cost. And the little money that was spent was collectively recovered. Thus _Nagarik_ like _Dharti ke Lal_ was a film that not only was completely supported by the IPTA, but it was indeed its own project, even though it was not produced under the IPTA banner as _Dharti Ke Lal_ was in 1949.

Both _Bari Theke Paliye_ and _Meghe Dhake Tara_ continue the discourse of _Nagarik_ in a more subtle, less overt form. Both the notion of the pavement dweller and the process of marginalisation
that are but suggested in *Nagarik* are developed further in terms of a class perspective in *Bari Theke paliye*. Ghatak presents the gradual recession of the people to the margins when he presents their reduction into the pavement dweller and this is further reflected metaphorically in their eventual loss of memory, and hence of the self.

*Meghe Dhake Tara*, like *Bari Theke Paliye*, extends the discourse of *Nagarik* both on the axis of class and of patriarchy. Nita like Ramu is presented a victim of class and further of patriarchy. She too like Ramu is constantly juxtaposed with several other women in similar situations, in order to contextualise her individual struggle within the backdrop of the deteriorating condition of the middle class. But it is with *Meghe Dhake Tara* that Ghatak delves into the domain of melodrama and explores a different form in order to reflect a reality that had been so much a part of his discourse. Further, it is also with this film that the notion of the folk that was first developed in *Ajantrik* finds a more subtle expression, for here Ghatak presents the contemporary reality along the axis of the myth, through the medium of the folk. The film thus suggests an exploration of the epic as a form, and this search finally culminates in a more complete form in *Komal Gandhar*. Thus the discourse of *Nagarik* continues from *Bari Theke Paliye* to *Meghe Dhake Tara*, but with *Meghe Dhake Tara* the form undergoes a change. Also, the expression of his content becomes more subtle and complex. In comparison to *Meghe Dhake Tara*, *Nagarik* moves in an almost straight simple narrative form. It is primarily through the medium of the narrational commentary and the dialogues of the characters that much of the discourse in *Nagarik* is carried forward, though here too, Ghatak explores the medium of sound as well as of image, especially in his experimental use
of camera angles. But the exploration of other cinematic and narrational domains across several different axes becomes much more subtle in *Meghe Dhake Tara*.

It is with *Komal Gandhar* that the form and content of Ghatak's cinema further undergo a change. *Komal Gandhar* like his previous films is an inquiry into post independence India. It very subtly reviews the discourse of *Nagarik*. Whereas in *Nagarik*, it is through Jatin Babu and Shukunto that Ramu is constantly reminded to participate in the communist uprising and to join the party, *Komal Gandhar* subtly critiques the party and its politics as reflected in the breakdown, conflict and division of IPTA. The film begins by presenting the split between the two theater groups, Niriksha and Dakshinapath. Despite all their attempts at a rejoinder, the joint production of Kalidasa's *Shakuntalam* is an utter fiasco due to the internal politics and manipulative tendencies of one of the groups that eventually tries to sabotage the performance. The film presents the struggle of the artists vis-a-vis their families, the society, the process of a theatrical production but most of all vis-a-vis each other. It presents their struggle for the autonomy of art and artists as against the inferrable background of the politics prevalent within IPTA and the party during the early 50s. Thus *Komal Ghandar*, besides documenting the history of IPTA, the struggle of its artists, their concern with folk and therefore popular form as well as their search for a new content that would be contemporary, presents and critiques the power dynamics operative within the groups and the struggle of the genuine artist to break through these unanalytical forms of operation. *Komal Gandhar* reiterates Ghatak's notion of art as presented in his 1951 draft of Policy Principles of IPTA. Moreover it critiques the power polemics in IPTA and the party. The film
further restates Ghatak’s stance as he had expressed it in his 1955 letter to the CPI, where he had not only clarified his position but had vehemently taken a stand against the modes of functioning of the CPI and the partisan stance of its leadership. He then had foreseen an impending disaster if the party did not take measures to reassess itself. Thus the odyssey of Ghatak’s political discourse from *Nagarik* to *Komal Gandhar* suggests a need for an appraisal of the party politics. *Komal Gandhar* does not present the euphoria of the Communist uprising as suggested in *Nagarik*, though it does present the struggle and the enthusiasm of the artists. It rather reiterates the need to reassess oneself in the form of the party before the party decides to look outward in order to prepare the people towards a revolution. Moreover it is with *Komal Gandhar* that the form of Ghatak’s cinema further explores the medium of the epic. The film disseminates the discourse of division on four planes simultaneously: the division of the nation; the split within IPTA, here presented through the split in Niriksha and Dakhinapath; the dilemma within Shakuntala; and the conflict that Anasuya, the contemporary Shakuntala, experiences. Ghatak thus develops an abstraction of division by juxtaposing several variations of the same discourse and by amalgamating this reality with myth and legend.

*Suberna Rekha* further develops the form of *Komal Gandhar* and *Meghe Dhake Tara*. If *Komal Gandhar* explores the medium of epic by presenting a single reality at several levels simultaneously and if *Meghe Dhake Tara* delves within the domain of melodrama and develops it along the axis of the folk, then *Suberna Rekha* assimilates the melodramatic mode (in its use of co-incidences) and the epic (in its use of the chronicle play as well as when it develops the contemporary in the context of the myth). But, like
Meghe Dhake Tara, it also subverts the melodramatic mode when it abruptly cuts the most melodramatic sequences at their highest point. It then opens them into the domain of the epic. Through the process of subversion, Ghatak first develops his sequences on the plane of catharsis and then by cutting them abruptly, suddenly creates distanciation following the epic tradition.

In terms of a political analysis the film questions the very premise of activism that had been expressed in Nagarik and was presented in Komal Gandhar. Suberna Rekha revolves around the existence of an activist in the form of Hariprasad and Ishwar and overtly states that it is a socio-historical moment that creates the possibility for the birth of activism, and for an activist to exist; but given the then political scenario, an activist, the film suggests, either would be co-opted like Ishwar, or would turn cynical like Hariprasad or would eventually die an unheroic death, struggling like Abhiram. The film reassesses the notion of a political struggle as presented in Nagarik. It now problematises it in terms of the complexities of a socio-historical moment and states that given the then present context, a political movement would inevitably be co-opted. Moreover by referring to Kshudiram, Suberna Rekha obliquely suggests the need for recognizing the individual struggle as a collective struggle and states that unless and until an ordinary person, struggling for even the slightest change in the system, is not recognized as an activist, the struggle will come to naught. It is only when the individual struggle is recognized by the larger movement that it will become collective. Indeed, the struggle of each individual, howsoever trivial and private it may seem to be, is significant. Hariprasad, while referring to Kshudiram, states that Kshudiram knew who he was and that was his strength but we 'kshudiram', though we constantly struggle, fail to recognize
our struggle as significant. He thus says that ‘fighting a war, we think it is a small scuffle.’ The film suggests that it is only when the struggle of the ordinary people is recognized by themselves as well as by the larger movement that the foundations of a revolution will become possible.

Suberna Rekha problematises the discourse of Nagarik at two levels. It problematises the notion of activism when it emphasizes the need to reassess a political struggle in a given historical moment and further suggests that an activist cannot survive in isolation. Thus an activist must continue to work as part of a larger movement and in this Suberna Rekha reiterates and upholds the discourse of Nagarik. At another level the film states that a movement exists not only within a party or its own self-defined parameters but also outside it and this larger, invisible, isolated struggle, like Sita’s struggle and the struggle of millions of ordinary people, must be acknowledged as a people’s movement in order for any revolution to become a reality. If Nagarik states that Ramu must join the Communist uprising, Suberna Rekha states that the Communist uprising must recognize the isolated struggles of individuals like Sita and then bring them within its fold.

It is with Yieh Quin that the discourse of Bari Theke Paliye, Meghe Dhake Tara, Komal Gandhar and Suberna Rekha finds a different echo. If all these films deal with the aftermath of the partition and the independence of the nation and its grotesque repercussions, then Yieh Quin deals with the genesis of the division of the nation. It analysis the way the politics of the state disseminated itself by making the people imbibe and hence internalize its politics in the development of the communal psyche. The film was shot in 1970, twenty three years after the
partition of the nation. The date of its production suggests Ghatak's ongoing trauma related to the partition of the nation and further brings to the fore the situation of India after independence, both in terms of the economic crisis of the people and the ongoing communal riots. Thus the production of Yieh Quin even in 1970 does not seem to be out of place, as the issues that the film raises, situated though it is in 1947, are very contemporary still. Though Ghatak throughout had been preoccupied with the theme of the partition of the nation, it is for the first time in Yieh Quin that he analyses the issue of communalism in the context of the creation of the communal psyche. By doing so, the film refers to the process through which the state apparatus works in its most hegemonic form by apparently generating a fear psychosis but subtly creating a psyche that imbibes the politics of the state in its totality.

It is with Titash Ekti Nadir Nam, that the form of Ghatak's cinema once again reiterates the epic mode. The film brings to the fore the confiscation of the river bed that belongs to the fisher-folk community by the Zamidars and the peasantry. It presents the changing economic structure as the main force behind all this conflict and tension. It thus presents the uprooting and the eventual elimination of a community and subtly reflects the economic base of the system that has made this possible. But at a deeper level the film problematises the notion of change. It somewhere undertones that it is important for communities to change with the change in the economic structure and to dream new dreams however hard they may appear to be. Hence if the Malos as a community is to survive it must accept both the change in the course of the river Titash which has taken a different direction and the change in the economic structure. Given their circumstances, had the Malos as a community accepted the change
in the course of the river, for the land the river left behind was abundant, rich and fertile, the community would have survived. But the Malos refuse to accept this change and eventually they as a community perish. The land is usurped by the Zamidars. The film obliquely states that if the communities do not change with the change in the economic structure then sooner or later the people/the communities will be marginalised and eliminated as the new order inevitably will take over. Hence if the people refuse to accept it they will be destroyed and will allow others from a different class to encroach, exploit and benefit from their land. Titash Ekti Nadir Nam thus ends with Basanti, a woman from the fishing community, dreaming of a paddy field on the bank of a dry, arid Titash, the commencement thus of a new civilization.

The screenplay of Kumara Sambhavam reiterates the discourse of Titash. It presents the separation of a peasant couple due to the prevailing feudal order and hence depicts the ongoing postponement of the birth of their child. The birth of the child becomes a reality only after the couple finally converge to the city. Ghatak on the one hand analyzes the need to bring to an end the feudal system and on the other brings to the fore the need for industrialization to take over. Industrialization here is not presented as a panacea to any problem but it is with its advent that eventually the workers will unite towards a Communist revolution. Thus the birth of the child symbolizes the birth of the new order which is made possible with the shift to an industrial set-up.

Like Suberna Rekha the screenplay of Shey Bishnupriya analyses the complete breakdown of moral values and the confusion surrounding a political ideology. The screenplay depicts the
rape of both Shushma who consequently goes mad as well as of Bishnupriya and her eventual murder. Bishnupriya is raped and then burned alive by the local Gundas, but her death is projected as a suicide by the Gundas, the police and the press. The film on the one hand depicts a complete breakdown of moral values, on another level it presents the scenario of post independence India and depicts the press and the police as the forerunners of the new Gunda regime. At yet another level it brings to the fore the pseudo intellectualism prevalent in the then Bengal. The intellectuals here discuss significant issues regarding American neocolonialism, issues surrounding Chile, South Vietnam, Cambodia, West Asia, Rhodesia, South Africa, etc. but when it comes to the immediate problems and the enormous atrocities committed on the people in front of their own eyes they choose to remain silent. Ghatak sees this silence and the intellectual discussion of the world political scene as a diversion, a refusal to confront the immediate burning reality. The film thus argues that though it is important to look at the political upheavals and movements in the world, yet at the same time one must not overlook the immediate crisis. Even if it is ordinary and does not create history, it has to be dealt with. The screenplay in a very harsh manner states that people must organize themselves against crimes and oppressions. The spitting of Bishnupriya as she lays half burnt on the lens of the camera is a means through which Ghatak implicates the spectators and interpolates within their space. The screenplay ends with the title card; "If one is to live one must be angry, sacred anger is the need of the day." The film completely breaks the notion of film diagesis and very self-consciously depicts the story of one family but inversely states that if people are not aroused to take any action, this will eventually become everyone’s story. It depicts
a silent complicity of people whether they are intellectuals or ordinary passive people in the atrocities committed. The intellectuals are involved in discussions that do not concern people and the ordinary people are passive and are losing their moral and ideological moorings. Thus they are all perpetuating a rotten system.

Ghatak's short story *Janmabhumi* in a different context critiques youth activism that is devoid of a context. It presents the story of a school teacher who loses his young wife. He now has his little daughter to look after. He constantly struggles hard to take care of the child but is unsuccessful. Finally he decides to remarry exclusively on account of his daughter. The news spreads around and the youth of the city find it atrocious that a middle-aged man is thinking of a remarriage. They play a practical joke on him and the news is published in the papers. The master finally leaves the city for his village but there too he is insulted and humiliated. Eventually along with his daughter he leaves the village in search of a better land. The story in an altogether different manner reassesses the notion of radicalism and probably states the need to situate it within a context.

Thus an analysis of Ghatak's cinema from *Nagarik* to *Komal Gandhar* to *Suberna Rekha* to *Shey Bishupriya* to *Janmabhumi* to *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* reveals a certain reassessment not of a political ideology but of the form that it is taking. Ghatak's constant review of the form of this ideology at different stages of his life and the form that it must take needs to be considered and analyzed. Thus if *Nagarik* begins with a view to simply join the Communist uprising, *Komal Gandhar* demands a reassessment of the implementation of this ideology in the then political
scenario. Suberna Rekha furthers the discourse of *Nagarik* when it states that an activist simply cannot survive in isolation but it also problematises its discourse when it demands a reappraisal of the historical moment in which an ideology is situated. The film adds a new dimension to the discourse of *Nagarik* when it states that the struggle of ordinary people, even when they are struggling in isolation, must be accepted by the movement as a part of its struggle. Hence, if the people must join the movement, the movement too must recognize their individual struggles. Shey Bishnupriya critiques the over indulgence of intellectuals in intellectualism and states that this indulgence eventually could lead to a digression from the burning issues. *Janmabhumi* reassess the form of youth activism and states that it is turning non-discriminatory, and decontextualised. Hence, with each successive work Ghatak offers a critique to his own earlier statements by reassessing them and adds new strands and dimensions to his previous discourse. But it is with *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* that his political odyssey becomes complete, for here he once again reassess himself and clearly states his position and ideology.

It is with *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* that Ghatak critically examines his political arguments beginning with *Nagarik* and reformulates several of his ideas and concepts. The film being Brechtian in its mode, destroys the notion of film diagesis and is highly experimental. It begins and ends with the sardonic smile of the creator in a highly self-conscious mode and refers to the rhythm of life as it has become in Calcutta. Like Suberna Rekha and Shey Bishnupriya it invites the spectators to have a glimpse of the contemporary life in Bengal. It begins with a bizarre dance of three figures in black. The recurrence of this dance across the film acts as a refrain and suggests the
orgiastic dance of unabashed vested interests in which we are all involved. While referring to this dance, Ghatak states, 'we are all responsible for this weird, ghostly dance.' The film is also marked by another significant refrain that states that the entire universe is burning including the narrator.

*Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* revolves around the odyssey of four homeless characters driven away from their homes for several different reasons. All these reasons are highly political. Banglabala, who metaphorically represents the spirit of Bengal, is driven out of her land due to Yaksha's massacres in 1971. Lost, deserted she walks across the city roaming around in search of her lost father and is in search of a shelter, in the 'vast worthless Bengal'. Nachiketa, an engineer, like hundreds of other young engineers, moves around in search of a home and a job but soon realizes that the country does not need engineers. He finally reconciles himself to working as a labourer but even that job is not available, for the big industrialists are shifting their factories to other states and are creating artificial lock-outs. As Neelkantha, Nachieteka and Banglabala pass through the streets, Ghatak presents on both sides of the roads rows of closed factories depicting the massive problem of unemployment, retrenchment and exploitation. Moreover, being a Bengali from East Bengal it is impossible for Nachiketa to get a job, as he states, he is not a 'son of the soil.' By presenting the model of discrimination that the Indian government followed in independent India Ghatak emphasizes the lack of any prospects for its so-called citizens. Jagannath, a school teacher, has been compelled to leave his village as the situation due to riots is very tense there. He arrives in Calcutta in search of a shelter and a job and finding neither he wanders around but finds no place to rest. Neelkantha, a representative of the irresponsible
middle class intelligentsia, is presented as wasted and degenerated not because he is not willing to do anything but because the times have degenerated to such an extent that very few options are available to him as an artist/revolutionary.

In the script of *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo*, Ghatak had planned to present this scenario through the technique of a staccato montage of stills of the atrocities committed in Bangladesh. He had thought of presenting heaps of dead bodies, vultures, tanks, burning houses, raped women, wide eyed children and the like with one half of blank dark between each shot. Further he had planned to present spatterings of sub-machine guns IEC, by progressively using shots of lesser and lesser length to finally present a blank white screen where absolute silence was to prevail. At the same time he had conceived the characters walking across the streets looking for a job for Nachiketa only to find rows of closed factories on both sides of the road. Further the reign of terror in Bengal is depicted through the statements of Jagannath. Once again through the technique of a staccato montage Ghatak had proposed to present, on glass in reverse, reflection upside down shots of daily bomb throwing, police raids, headless bodies, etc. And this scenario of acute crisis in Bengal was conceptually to be juxtaposed with a scene in a bar, where some famous intellectuals, some big executives, some idle rich would be gossiping while ordering drinks. They were to be depicted as very perturbed over the condition of the country. Some were to discuss the issue of Bangladesh, some the Agrarian revolution in Cuba, some the question of the Naxalite movement in Bengal and the stand of the Bengal Congress, CPI and CPI (M), some the question of anti-social elements, and some would be discussing CRP in Bengal and while discussing these issues they would be cutting jokes.
The film also brings to the fore the plight of the artisans in the form of Panchanan Ustad and their gradual marginalisation as the times and the context are changing. Panchanan Ustad states that on the one hand the city folk buy their art for decoration without really understanding what it means and on the other with the changing times people no longer value traditional folk art. The result is that not only are the folk forms dying or are getting co-opted but along with them the artisans too are dying. Further, the film through the dialogue of Panchanan Ustad and Jagannath establishes the fact that the Brahmans appropriated the culture of the indigenous people and, in a way, colonized them. Panchanan Ustad vehemently states that Sanskrit is a foreign language as it came from outside and thus it is wrong to impose it on the culture and the context of the indigenous people. In the script of the film Ghatak also analyses the fact that most people from America who have become hippies are basically the children of working class people. They too are exploited in their countries and one needs to analyze as to why they have become hippies. The reason the film offers is that they have lost faith in all capitalist values. And so in order to register their protest they have become hippies. Ghatak thus extends the notion of class struggle beyond all national boundaries.

The film further presents the appropriation of the Naxalite movement by the police, the government and the local gundas who decide to attack the rich money-lenders and easily pass their crime on to the Naxalites. The ordinary people are made to believe that the Naxalites are indulging in mindless violence but actually it is the police and the government who are involved in spreading this falsification. Ghatak presents a minister delivering long speeches regarding the development in Bengal but
juxtaposes this image with the image of a barking dog in order to create a montage of corruption. He presents the movement of the Naxalites to reclaim the usurped land of the people as against the non implementation of the land ceiling act by the state. As Neelkantha stands clutching his head, reflecting on this reality, on the sound track the slogans of the peasants are heard.

The film at length analyses the Naxalite movement. It pays its salutations and homage to all the dedicated young men and women who are scarifying their lives for the cause. Neelkantha refers to them as the cream of Bengal and calls them heroes. But at the same time he says that their struggle is as futile as the revolutionaries of 'Agniayug' (1920-40, Kshudiram and all) or the Japanese 'Kamakaze' (the suicide squad). Ghatak in the form of Neelkantha reflects on the Naxalite movement. He refers to the evolution of Marxism, from the time of the scientific socialism of Karl Marx and Engels, and then goes on to elaborate the form under which it got modified by Lenin when he propounded the thesis of imperialism, the moribund state of capitalism. He then refers to Stalin under whom Marxism degenerated into bureaucratic socialism and then to Mao, who propounded that the peasantry will lead the revolution, a thesis which at some levels was entirely different from the Marxian thesis that the industrial workers will lead the revolution. Neelkantha finally refers to Debray and then to Cheguevara who went back to the intellectuals and students as the vanguards of revolution, but, reflects Neelkantha, this can be possible in small islands like Cuba or countries in South America whose peasant civilization does not go further back than 500 years. But a country like India whose civilization is at least 35,000 years old and which has given birth to the most philosophical thought that the world has ever seen cannot be comprehended in terms of Guevarist philosophy.
Neelkantha ends his discussion on a note of utter confusion, for he and for that matter his entire generation is confused as to what can explain the Indian condition or particularly the conditions in Bengal? But he is clear that the activities of the Naxalites will only lead towards an 'infantile disorder.'

'Since the entire generation of our children have no future,' states Neelkantha, some solution has to be found. Though he is entirely confused yet he is sure that there must be some solution. Obliquely he is suggesting that one has to begin by understanding Bengal's historic condition scientifically. One needs to analyze the history, the development, the demographic data, the land tenure system, the evolution of the economic classes in the past two hundred years and finally the source of the National Liberation Movement and its culmination in the great betrayal by the bourgeoisie in 1947. One cannot think in terms of a revolution, states Neelkantha, by negating the history of India which is of many thousand years as well as its brilliant philosophical thoughts. But at the same time, he suggests, we have to analyze the history and the philosophy and see what is progressive in these and what is degenerative, as one cannot get rid of a negative system just by saying 'no' to it. One first has to analyze its strength and its flaws; then only can one uproot it. He concludes his discussion by stating that 'we the elders are utterly confused as our old world is crumbling down and we cannot feel the pulse of the young revolutionaries'. In fact, states Neelkantha, 'we cannot feel our own pulse as all that we had learnt to be the solutions, the answers have vanished in thin air. And now directionless we are searching.' Towards the end of the film Neelkantha offers an analogy to his present state in the story of 'Madan Tate', that he narrates to his young son Satyo. States Neelkantha, "Do you remember the story of
'Madan tate' of Manik Bandyopadhyay? He had asked, '... am I to weave with the help of the money of Bhubin who is a money-lender? Am I going to cheat you? By not using the loom my feet are suffering from rheumatic pain, that is why I mobilize the empty loom.' One must do something even if it is running the empty loom." And this story of Madan, the weaver, had already found an echo in Neelkantha's statement that there is a long journey ahead and that like Roman Rolland he wants to shout, 'I will not rest'. He thus concludes that we are all passing through a great moral crisis, where things will happen progressively in a more heinous manner and then they will explode and then only something positive will emerge. The film ends with an affirmation of life: despite everything, life, states Neelkantha, is flowing, is desperate and tremendous. And hence, we are all looking forward to the birth of the young Bengal, which is yet to be born but shall soon take birth. Jukti Takko Ar Gappo thus concludes its analysis by referring to a poem by Yeats that Neelkantha had recited to Banglabala and Nachieketa towards the beginning of the film:

Some day at some new morn,
We will learn that
sleeping is not death
Hearing this the whole world will change its tune.

Ghatak thus begins his cinema by upholding the then prevalent stream of left politics in its most conventional form, in the form of the party (CPI). He then across his cinema not only begins to critique the functional tactics of the party but also adds new strands to his modes of perceiving the people's reality. As his cinema progresses he varies and develops his perception in its nuances widening his political perspective. Apparently he ends his political journey by critiquing the most radical form of
left politics in India, the Naxalite movement while also stating his confusion regarding the form that a movement must adapt. Significantly, although he nowhere doubts the sincerity, ability, and self-sacrificing spirit of the Naxalites, yet he insists on the need for an analysis and a reappraisal. Finally he ends his odyssey by stating that the form of any left ideology no matter how radical, can go wrong if it does not emerge from the given socio-historical milieu of the people. Towards the end of his life Ghatak had felt that the present generation had lost its umbilical connection with reality and hence, he states, "either we are thieves or are lost, or else we are a rally of cowards running away. Nobody is a true son." Only the revolutionaries and to be specific the Naxalites, he felt, were the cream of Bengal, the only capital that he felt was left and hence, he pleads with them, in Jukti Takko Ar Gappo as well as in one of his interviews, that they must not sacrifice their lives blindly. He felt that they were like the revolutionary children, both successful and unsuccessful, 'strong as martyrs and yet blind and stubborn'. Ghatak strongly believed that the present would inevitably degenerate to its extreme and only then would a positive system emerge. This disintegration, he felt, was inevitable in a society with so many class contradictions. The youth because of frustration would eventually turn either irresponsible or passive and the artists and intellectuals too would embody the signs of this degeneration. But once society degenerated completely it would give birth to something new and beautiful. A change will probably take place only when people experience extreme anger which he throughout felt was the need of the hour for that alone can break through the shackles of passivity. What it would be and how it would become possible, he states that he does not know. As an artist he felt his job was
not to offer solutions but merely to pose the problems in all their varied complexities. Society, he felt, was a complex entity with several streams and tributaries; to identify the right stream and follow it, was the primary question.  

II  

In order to see the process in which praxis develops and positions itself within the cinematic medium, Ghatak’s form needs to be unravelled. Following the epic paradigm Ghatak creates a form that violates the conventional modes of spectatorship as well as those of narratology. Even when his cinematic form is framed within the conventional codes of the cinematic apparatus as many a time it is, this codification operates through a constant process of subversions, that are situated not elsewhere but within the seemingly conventional codes.

Epic as a form is highly self-conscious and proceeds through the techniques of distanciations, interpolations and interpretations. Operating within the epic paradigm Ghatak uses several devices to subvert the conventional cinematic codes. He often works against the 180° angle in order to violate the eyeline match and also at times works against the point of view shot and the subjective shot. The other devices that he uses include a cut in motion that suddenly creates a jerk and serves as a point of interpolation. At times he experiments with the wide angle lens in order to create distortions and uses the technique of de-sync. This on the one hand foregrounds the fictionality of cinema and on the other disembodies a discourse so that it can move away from the individual, subjective domain towards an objectification of the discourse. This objectification of the discourse through disembodying a character
from his vocal chords is brought forward through a different technique in Komal Gandhar, when the disembodied voice referring to a historical discourse is disseminated onto the landscape. The techniques of de-sync and other related techniques of disembodification are always related in Ghatak to a socio-political-historical analysis, whether it is in Komal Gandhar, Jukti Takko Ar Gappo, or in Meghe Dhake Tara.

Many a time Ghatak’s cinema foregrounds the constituents of the cinematic apparatus, like light, sound, and at times even the negative film strip, thus operating against the codes of realism. Similarly, his cinema develops an altogether different notion of a close up in the image of an upturned gaze, that is a close-up and yet positions itself against a close-up. In order to destabilise the general modes of perception he often works through a de-centred image of the protagonist, which is either to the right or to the left of the frame, but very rarely to the center. This is furthered through the use of the tilted, diagonal frames accompanied by the low angle shot. At times he uses, ‘below the knee shot,’ that on the one hand deframes the centrality of the viewer’s perception and on the other universalizes the subjective, individual crisis and achieves an objectification of this crisis as universal within a class based society. The ‘below the knee shot,’ more often than not, submerges itself into the recurring shot of the movement of several legs marching in unison, which not only depersonalizes the crisis, but universalizes the individual into the domains of a collective uprising.

Ghatak makes elaborate use of the episodic form which in various different forms is developed across his cinema. The form distanciates the spectators by involving them in the very process
of its formation and implicitly suggests how realities are constructed.

Another significant device employed by Ghatak is the use of inter-texts, intra-texts and several other inter-cinematic devices. Not only does the use of these devices make his cinema highly self-conscious, self-reflexive and apparently self-referential but this self-referentiality strategically leads to a certain contemporaneity. It thus establishes the historicity of the discourse and situates it in its socio-historical context. Thus it is through these inter-texts that the referential codes representing the tensions as well as the subtle mouldings of counter-movements against these crisis are incorporated.

Looking inward, Ghatak’s cinema adopts inter-textuality as a strategy to analyze the outside existing crises and hence turns referential. It thus becomes a connecting point between the form and the content. Dialectically the inter-texts merge with the texts as connections are drawn across the two. The inter-texts are also a point where, myth, history and the contemporary meet. It is through this dialogue that the contemporary is developed through the perspective of a certain historicity which is not merely linear. This dialogue between the myth and the contemporary in Ghatak is further developed through the juxtaposition of the sound and the image; more often than not, the two are used as counterpoints. Thus he develops a discourse simultaneously at two levels, for the sound generally refers to the myth, while the image reflects the contemporary. History thus gets inscribed dialectically.

In order to create an alert spectator, Ghatak interpolates within their space and at times also implicates the spectator within the film space, thus demanding their accountability as
well as shaking them out of their complacency. Further, once again through this process, the demarcation between film and reality gets blurred, as the film enters into the domain of reality (though not through realism). The viewpoint of the spectator is at times overtly encompassed within the film space through the medium of dialogues and through the interaction of the characters with the implied spectator as in Komal Gandhar. But many a time this incorporation is developed more subtly merely through the juxtaposition of camera angles, incorporating the viewpoint of the spectator rather than that of the characters through the use of objective shots. But the interpolation within the spectator's space is most powerful when he directly addresses them rather than when he merely presents their point-of-view. In both Jukti Takko Ar Gappo and in Shey Bishnupriya, Ghatak implicates the spectators within the cinematic apparatus when he presents the central character flinging liquor as well as spitting onto the lens of the camera respectively. And this is projected onto the entire screen in order to shake and shock the spectators out of their complacency. In Jukti Takko Ar Gappo, the body of Neelkantha is flung towards us, the spectators demanding our accountability in the formation of a rotten system. The fingers of the three dancing figures, who act as a refrain in the film, constantly point towards us. The spectator is further implicated through the use of title-cards that not only are a rupture to break the notion of a film diagesis but once again through this technique Ghatak incorporates significant realities. The screenplay of Shey Bishnupriya begins with the title card, "This play is to break all other plays" and ends with the card signifying, "If one has to live, one must be angry, sacred anger is the order of the day. Go home and brood. Adieu." This suggests that such anger alone
will break across the passive syndrome that perpetuates these hellish oppressions.

Thus, in Ghatak, not only does the content involve the element of analysis but the very process of its construction and presentation provides the space for this analysis to develop. The form thus creates the space for a discourse that will lead to a praxis creating the spectator as an active observer participating in the process of the formation of this praxis.
Notes


9. References are to Ritwik Ghatak’s personal, unpublished notes on the conception of Nagarik.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. The argument is Ajay Basu’s in Haimanti Banerjee, Ritwik Kumar Ghatak, p. 76.


14. Reference is to Ritwik Ghatak’s unpublished, personal notes on the conception of the script of Jukti Takko Ar Gappo.


19. Andre Bazin argues: "In a typical American comedy a director returns as often as he can to a shot of the characters from the knee up which is said to be best suited to the spectator's attention or the viewer's, the natural point of balance of his mental adjustment." What Is Cinema, Vol. I, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 23-40.