Chapter 4: Discursive Spaces

Ghatak's last film *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo* chronicles the life of Neelkantha Bagchi (played by Ghatak himself), an enigmatic man who claims himself as a "broken intellectual," contending with existential crisis, ideology, and identity. For Geeta Kapur, "the fictional subject-in-history is put through critical scrutiny and becomes the figure for deconstructing the otherwise teleological narratives of nationalist history" (2805) in the film. As Sarkar says, "Through the creative contagion of various discursive units and levels—inducing one argument in the middle of another thought, layering historical moments with mythic allusions, setting up a relay of commentaries between sound elements and images—Ghatak forges a dialogic, intertextual approach" (206). Using journey as a motif from the pavement of the city to the forest indicates complete acceptance of homelessness.[77] The film revolves around an extensive array of philosophical, political,[78] and cultural concepts via the characters' dialogues and encounters within the film's locations. How do they become discursive spaces? By conducting an in-depth reading of narrative techniques, visual elements, and ideological engagements, this chapter endeavours to reveal how Ghatak traverses boundaries. It tries to foster a more philosophical comprehension of the film's possibilities and its importance within the wider framework of spatiality in Indian cinema. Through a comprehensive textual analysis, and a synthesis of

[77] Ghatak said, "I have based *Jukti* on the experiences that I gathered during my stays in different villages and towns during the period between 1970 and 72. I planned to attack these through the film. Cruel and immoral things were taking place, these should not have happened" (50–51). See Will an artist make film only for money? in *Ritwik Ghatak face to face: Conversations with the master*, published by Cine Central, Calcutta.

[78] Ghatak said, "The name of the film is *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo*, without story a movie cannot delight the audience. Hence, the story. In the deeper level the film is all reasoning and logic. It is completely a political film"(95). See Interviews in *Ritwik Ghatak: Arguments and Stories.*

insights from relevant scholarly works, I proceed to provide novel viewpoints on how a film constructs discursive spaces that are in line with its thematic and socio-political milieus.

Construction of Discursive Spaces in the Film

> Ritwik Ghatak counterposes an exile's journey with a communitarian ideal and dream of plenitude still within reach in his milieu...Ghatak tackles (through what Adorno called 'negative commitment') the initial progressivism and consequent stasis into which the historical consciousness of the modern subject may be led. He thus extrapolates on the crisis as an Indian, in post-independence India. In the process you get an amazing confluence of discourses: from the melodrama that refers among other things to the Indian classical tradition and its rhetorical mode; to the existential normativity of the high modern; to Marxist historicity and its transcendent form of praxis. This is as complex a handling as you can hope to achieve on the subject and on the lost utopia of subjectivity in the contemporary consciousness. (Kapur 2829)

A pictorial mode of positioning figures in space also becomes a means of mapping the subject in history. Ghatak offers the ground for the filmic narrative playing with meanings through a set of spatial paradigms in which we as viewers are variously positioned. The film situates the story in a historical context. Ghatak says, "In it, the political backdrop of West Bengal from 1971 to 1972 as I saw, it has been portrayed" (Ghatak "Sukh Asukh O Ritwik Ghatak" 263). The temporal context of the story is a crucial period in the historical trajectory of both Bengal and India. Ghatak coincides two significant events: the Indo-Pak conflict which resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh, and the escalating Naxalite Movement that swept across rural Bengal.

Neelkantha[79] is a disillusioned intellectual, and struggling with alcohol addiction. With his team, he embarks on an abstract journey from the city to the village, and ultimately dies in the forest. As he succumbs to his impending demise, he proceeds to recount the story of resilience of Madan Tanti of the short story *Shilpi* by Manik Bandyopadhyay: "Will I buy raw stock from the bourgeoisie? Betray all of you? By not working I have become stiff so I weave without cotton, something has to be done."[80]

I

Before the abstract journey begins, a young woman from Bangladesh enters Neelkantha's rented flat. Her name is Bangabala. Her father was killed in Bangladesh. She then fled to Calcutta. It is obvious that Ghatak is here, through the oral history of Bangabala, referring to the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. He keeps the screen dark for fifteen seconds to make us think of all the atrocities. The war, in fact, had its origin in the Partition of British India in 1947. It precipitated the establishment of two nations of India and Pakistan. Pakistan was divided into East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh) and West Pakistan (present-day Pakistan), two regions that were

[79] Neelkantha is the name of the Hindu god Shiva. He ingested oceanic poison in order to spare the world from its destruction. Durga, who, in Hindu mythology, is the spouse of Shiva. Ritaban Ghatak, the son of Ghatak, acted in the role of Satya. Satya translates to "true" in Bengali and Sanskrit. The Hindu mythological figure Nachiketa served as an inspiration for the character Nachiketa. Jagannath Bhattacharjee, an individual portrayed in the film, teaches the Sanskrit language and is considered as someone immersed in Vedic civilization. Panchanan Ustad embodies the characteristics of rural inhabitants: limited education, yet an abundance of indigenous heritage and culture.

[80] One has to act, one has to do something. This is the injunction in the *Gita*: Krishna orders Arjuna to perform his *svadharma*, which, in fact, defines him as a particular subject in a particular space and moment of history. To act independent of benefit, regardless of the outcome. In Ghatak's case, more pessimistically, this could also be an inactivity to act even though it might have no effect.

culturally and geographically distinct.[81] Later on, Bangladesh's attainment of independence signified the conclusion of a lamentable epoch in the history of South Asia. Demographic shifts occurred in Bangladesh in the wake of the war, as millions of refugees fled to India and rehabilitation efforts were initiated. Bangabala represents that multitude. Ghatak asks her, "Are you the soul of Bangladesh?" In response she replies, "Yes, I am Bangladesh...have come from Bangladesh." Now she roams around. She is searching for a shelter in the city, as she has nowhere to go. Bangabala is not a single entity for Ghatak anymore; she is the whole "Bangladesh." Ghatak is here, basically, giving the idea that after such exodus (both due to the Partition and 1971 war) the refugees end up in rented shelter (symbolic of no shelter) which they

[81] Disparities in language, culture, economic development, and politics, as Raghavan (2013), and Zaheer (1994) argued, tarnished the relationship between East and West Pakistan. East Pakistanis spoke Bengali for the most part, and they perceived themselves as being exploited and marginalized by the ruling West Pakistan. They were predominately Urdu-speaking military officials and politicians. A combination of linguistic, cultural discrimination, and political suppression contributed to the animosity in the Bengali Muslim community. Extensive protests were instigated by the denial of the Bengalis its rightful status as a national language. When the Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won a landslide victory in Pakistan's general elections in 1970, tensions escalated. West Pakistani authorities, most notably General Yahya Khan, rejected the Awami League's appeals for increased political freedom and regional autonomy for East Pakistan. The defiance of the elected representatives of East Pakistan to transfer powers instigated widespread riots and a ruthless suppression conducted by the Pakistani military. A critical juncture occurred on March 25, 1971, with the Pakistani army initiating Operation Searchlight. Achieving systematic targeting of civilians, indiscriminate violence, and widespread atrocities caused a humanitarian catastrophic crisis. In light of the severe repression, Bengali nationalists, with the support of India, formed the *Mukti Bahini* (Freedom Fighters). The dispute between India and Pakistan rapidly progressed into a war subsequent to pre-emptive airstrikes initiated by Pakistan against Indian airfields. The response of the international community to the conflict varied. Although certain countries, most notably India and the USSR, advocated for Bangladesh's independence, all other nations initially supported Pakistan. The magnitude of the atrocities, coupled with the humanitarian crisis, ultimately influenced a change in international sentiment in favour of Bangladesh. The conflict reached its zenith on December 16, 1971, when Pakistani forces yielded to the joint forces of India and Bangladesh.

would have to leave soon. Despite his negative approach towards life adding to Bangabala's bitter experiences, Neelkantha, assures her quoting Yeats:

Somewhere at some new moon

We'll learn that sleeping is not death

Hearing the whole earth change its tune

(At Galway Races)

II

The trio, consisting of Neelkantha, Bangabala and Nachiketa, spends the night in a Calcutta park. Neelkantha recalls the times when he and his wife were young and in love, and roamed around the rivers and forests of the Shillong Hills. He recalls the utopian pre-Partition days in Bengal amidst a post-Partition dystopia. The Partition of Bengal was an outcome of both religious and political circumstances. It coincided with the independence of India. The division caused, as Sengupta (2013) also argued, disruption to the cultural continuum of Bengal - a shared history, language, and literary tradition dating back centuries. Bengali intellectuals, poets, thinkers, writers, and artists of the era felt a profound sense of loss. They aspired to safeguard the cohesion of Bengal's cultural legacy in the wake of the Partition. Their vision was for a cultural bridge to surpass political boundaries. This intellectual movement was founded upon the conviction that although political divisions were unavoidable, Bengal's shared cultural ethos must remain intact. Literature and art constituted principal avenues by which the intellectuals

yearned for a cultural unification. Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam persisted in their influence beyond national boundaries. They placed emphasis on unity, humanism, and heritage. They conveyed the essence of a universal Bengaliness that surpassed geopolitical boundaries. Language, being a cornerstone of Bengali identity, played the role in the intellectual dialogue for advocating cultural unity. Intellectuals prioritized the preservation and promotion of the Bengali language as a unifying force. Efforts were made to standardize and elevate Bengali language and literature to ensure its continuity and vibrancy on both sides of the border. Activists fostered cultural collaboration and exchange between East and West Bengal. Literary magazines, art exhibitions and cultural festivals functioned as venues facilitating discourse and engagement. These initiatives sought to revive shared traditions, celebrate cultural unity, and cultivate a sense of belonging among the Bengalis. The legacy of this urge is evident in efforts to revive shared cultural traditions, and to foster a sense of unity among Bengalis. Ghatak found himself as an activist in that tradition. It is the park (a little greenery symbol of free space) in the concrete city where he dreams of the future. So, a short while later, his former writer-friend (played by the thespian Utpal Dutt) would support his activism saying: “He (Neelkantha) always kept on talking about the cultural unification of Bengal. Now he has stopped.” In fact, Ghatak had the same belief still, and that is why Neelkantha looks at Nachiketa and Bangabala and says, “the new Bangladesh still unborn, but inevitable.” Hence, Nachiketa and Bangabala who are constantly at odds with one another throughout the film, towards the end of the film, they would grow closer, symbolizing a new beginning.

III

Nāmāja āmi paṛatē pāralāma nā…

(I could not pray)

The trio, now joined by the Sankrit teacher (played by Bijan Bhattacharya), sit by the side of the river Ganges at the Prinsep Ghat and listen to this *baul* song. Ghatak meditates on his own life beside the river. As usual, Ghatak always finds no place better than the river-side for contemplative thoughts. As we know, Ghatak himself was a refugee. He sought to convey his and the generation's trauma and identity crisis resulting from the Partition of 1947 through his films. However, none of his films were able to resonate with the audience of his era, and his gradual decline into alcoholism and confinement to the asylum made him an iconic but ostracized figure. He is better understood only when his writings we read to understand his films. Ghatak always had a deep wound in his heart for those many reasons. These things are obvious in the lyrics of the *baul* song. His films, now, continue to serve as a testament to the period that the Bengali populace sought to disregard, even after his death several decades ago. But during his lifetime he was mostly misunderstood or remained under-appreciated.

That night a group of Calcutta's intellectuals sit around drinking and discussing the disintegration of Bengali society and culture in the public space of Kalighat-Keoratola area. Here, Neelkantha was neither socially nor financially successful, nor even politically influential. But he was intellectually superior. He becomes the Lord Shiva (who drank poison to save the world and became Neelkantha) of the post-Partition generation of intellectual. Everyone either respected him or feared him for his candidness. This is evidenced when he unexpectedly entered the social space of "elites" while they are consuming foreign liquor rather than the country liquor

of Neelkantha's possession. In the scene, he deliberately denies their aristocratic status and social standing. He was feared due to his non-compliance and lack of subservience. Neelkantha's discussions pertained to his "class" and the "intellectuals" who used their politico-intellectual networks for material advancements. For Ghatak, power loses its meaning when an intellectual submits to power. The true meaning of power remains intact only when the intellect proposes, and fights for a change. Ghatak's consequences also encompass the reason for the inability to alter the manner and objective of intellectual pursuits. His "socially conscious author" friend utilized his talent to compose pornographic literature. These works represent the "modern" literature of the twenty-first century and afforded him the opportunity to amass wealth, car ownership, and social status. Neelkantha disregards him, whereas he (the author friend) holds him in high regard. However, they both are the part of the lost generation.[82] Ghatak, thus, brings out the mournful condition of the time in the crematorium space of the city. Neelkantha imparts the sole *mantra* to his friend Satyajit Basu in the film. He illuminates in the way of duty that befits a genuine philosopher in the hope that contemplation or re-evaluation will eventually give rise to self-criticism. It could serve as the inception of counter-discourse:

"Think, think, practise thinking."

[82] A group of American writers consisting of Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, Don Dos Passos, E.E. Cummings etc. who came of age during the World War I. They were expatriates who later on moved to Paris. They were "lost" because they were war no longer relevant, were facing spiritual alienation the post-war United States. Ghatak, in a similar way, claims himself to be a part of a doomed generation in the post-Partition Bengal.

IV

Nachiketa attempts to get a job in a steel factory. However, the factory workers are on strike, and a man, the trade union leader, stands outside. He is bellowing about serving democracy, and Mother India. Ghatak here brings us to the trade union's ideological decline, which gave rise to the Marxian ideals of class struggle. It was once more an unavoidable truth for Ghatak. It is symbolically represented by the trade union leader's ostentatious, pointless yelling like a dog. The economy, in that period, remained under the continued dominance of money-holders and lenders. They continued to impose oppressive taxes and regulations. To better understand, we need to transition from the immediate post-independence period. In fact, subsequent to independence India inherited a colonial economy. It was marked by a small industrial base, but the newly formed state failed "to provide a nuanced picture of economic development in India since independence**"** (Corbridge 3-10). The newly independent nation was confronted with the dual challenge of addressing social justice. The nation-building process was significantly influenced by the working class since technology was far away from India then. The Indian government implemented a mixed economic model in the initial years following independence (Nayyar 3123). It prioritized both state-led industrialization and planned economic development. It resulted in the formalization of labour markets and the expansion of public sector enterprises. Labour laws implemented during this period to safeguard the rights of workers, to establish safe working conditions, and to regulate working hours. But their influence was restricted by political constraints and state intervention. Trade unions acquired substantial power and played a critical role in advocating for workers' rights. Advancements frequently did not benefit labourers who continued to encounter challenges such as debts, job insecurity, and low wages. Moreover, there was corruption. All of this astounded Ghatak. He was astounded by

an Independence that offered no chance of intellectual autonomy survival or progress whatsoever. The defeat of independence had severely damaged Ghatak's conscience to the point where it had a direct effect on him. It is unknown to us whether he had aspirations for utopian space. But the indication is that he harboured resentment and disappointment. These things he brings forth by using the industrial space. The utopian ideals are prefaced by a preoccupation with the historical parameters of revolutionary figures later in the film. It is linked to their successive failures in Marxist thought, and compared to the Naxalite guy who acts as a rebel, driven by ideologies incited by the then political leaders.

V

When they reach the countryside, we see the local peasants' rising against the landlords in the film. Ghatak pays considerable attention to the confrontation between the impoverished villagers and the feudal landlords.[83] This actually brings us back to the beginning of Naxalite Movement which emerged in the late 1960s in the Naxalbari region of West Bengal. It was a substantial

[83] Ghatak, in this regard, said, "While I was making my latest film, *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo,* I had to go to a village and had to stay there for a few days. The persons with whom I had to stay were a poor peasant couple, victims of my exalted didi, Indira Gandhi. I was at that time oozing blood, as I had six cavities in my left lung, that, too, at a very advanced stage of phthisis. Before every shot I would start vomiting blood. This peasant couple looked after me and fed me (though I had enough resources with me). One night I asked the lady (the wife), 'How do you live?' She said, 'Rice, wheat, bajra, bhutta. everything is a dream to us. We have a small plot of land from where we bring some Mindi which we sell in the market ten miles away, and buy a little mustard oil. We cannot buy kerosene. So we cannot afford the luxury of a lamp in our home. They eat almost poisonous herbs from nearby jungles once a day. The whole night they live in the dark. She said, 'The authorities have not yet been able to steal two things from us, God's air and the sun. But they will.' I am supposed to be a hard-boiled nut, but believe me, tears came to my eyes. Such is the condition of my people, and what kind of films do we make!" (41-42). See Filmmaking in *Rows and Rows of Fences*.

socio-political uprising that aimed to confront the systemic injustices and land inequalities that the rural poor encountered (Gupta 157-88). The movement was influenced by Maoist ideology. It necessitated of armed struggles against feudal landlords and the oppressive structures that maintained their dominance. Strategic use of ruses by peasants to subvert the power of landlords and redistribute land and resources was central to this movement. In rural Bengal, the Naxalite Movement was born in the midst of severe agrarian distress and socio-economic disparities. The majority of peasants were unable to benefit from the post-independence land reforms. They were caught in exploitative relationships with landlords. Reform bills favoured wealthier farmers and landlords. They actually left poorer peasants marginalized. As a result, the movement was initiated in 1967 by a violent clash in Naxalbari. A group of peasants attacked a local landlord. This event ignited a widespread rebellion among the rural impoverished. They endeavoured to challenge the rooted feudal system through direct action and armed struggle. The direct seizure of land owned by landlords was one of the primary strategies. To occupy and redistribute land among the landless peasants organized in secrecy and conducted night raids. The peasants' strategies also included guerrilla warfare tactics. Ghatak integrates these events into the film by using rural space scenarios. The historical particulars harmonize flawlessly with the narrative structure. He adopts the stance of an impartial observer though, while his alternate self endures agonizing anguish stemming from the pervasive sense of fatigue that characterized that politically tumultuous era. The restless Neelkantha, in his perplexing and incoherent discourse, alludes to a dysfunctional society that exhibits little regard for its own cultural and political legacies.

VI

The group meets Panchanan Ustad, a village chhau dancer, who offers them food and shelter. Panchanan shows his chhau masks. Panchanan talks about different types of masks, and interprets them. He shows his pride in his art. Ghatak here offers a critique of the concepts of progress and "modernity" in the indigenous space. The filmmaker refrains from idealizing the primitive existence of the indigenous population. Instead he sheds light on the social injustices that pervaded the post-independence era. The masks that the chhau dancers don are entrusted to the guardianship of the affluent now. They keep them as ornamental elements in their residential spaces. Ghatak becomes a cultural anthropologist almost throughout the film. He alleges that marginal identities have become commodities in today's era. In his introspection into the lives of the disadvantaged, he empathizes with the chhau dancers who are compelled to labour ceaselessly in order to support themselves from hand to mouth. Panchanan Ustad expresses his dismay at the indifference of the affluent and privileged section of society towards the cultural heritage of the marginalized. It reveals the anguish that Ghatak experienced as a filmmaker, and the ethnographic essence that is perpetually present in his works.

The film also addresses gender dynamics and power relations within patriarchal society. When Bangabala demands participation in the chhau dance Panchanan Ustad forbids her from dancing. He cites it as violation of their cultural custom. However, Bangabala's sheer tenacity enlightens Panchanan to the fact that he ought not to oppose her, as the advancement of society is inseparably linked to the active involvement of women. Panchanan says, "Dance, mother, dance. Only then we can grow," perhaps,[84] as Ghatak said, "All my films are influenced by this mother-

[84] In this context, Kumar Shahani writes: "Are you the soul of Bengal? Resurrected after the massacre of Bangladesh? Will she unite those who have already violated her for selfish needs or narrow pre-occupations? Will

complex...Mother complex is the 'raison-d'etre' of entire 'Chhau' dance sequence in *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo*. You equate the girl Shaonli with her...This is completely in tune with Jung" (Ghatak "Interviews" 105). The camera slowly and magnificently pans downward to elevate the dancers out of the frame, sustaining over nine movements in the chhau sequence. The film now unleashes the earthy power that has been lacking in the vibrancy and strength of the human gesture. This movement, the camera panning down, is characterized by grandeur. Thus, the impoverished villager is capable of transcending the hegemonic patriarchal structure through cultural expressions. The chhau performance is also noteworthy due to the fact that Bangabala, in her form as Goddess Durga, is revered as a saviour who is frequently invoked to eradicate the malevolence that is prevalent in the post-colonial society. When, following the chhau dance, the mask of the goddess Durga gradually vanishes and is replaced by the face of Bangabala fading in, Bangabala's identity as Durga becomes abundantly clear. The utilization of female figures as embodiments of space is always a recurring practice in Ghatak's cinematic style. Always a close-up of woman's face immediately evokes the archetypal mother goddess and ultimately the space. Bangabala like Seeta, Neeta, and Anasuya is a victim of Bangladesh Liberation war in addition to a refugee. But unlike them, she follows Neelkantha, Nachiketa, and Jagannath. They are homeless, but their not getting a home, implies a perpetual homelessness - a complete up-rootedness. They cannot locate their roots in any political philosophy, the characters, thus, are politically displaced too.

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her desire for the young man, who resents her presence, bring forth children, who — unlike Ritwik's generation — will not prostitute her? Perhaps — but he gives the girl no flesh and blood. And those that have flesh and blood are dehumanised by that very condition" (120). See I Am Burning, The Universe Is Burning.

The Brahmin Sanskrit teacher Jagganath and the 'rooted' rustic Panchanan have a fight there. According to Panchanan, the Sanskrit language is impure and, he elicits disgust. Sanskrit is considered impure due to its Brahmanical lineage and complete alienation from the subaltern populace. The auteur renders the phenomenon of marginalization contextual in the film. Simultaneously, resistance to systemic discourses of stereotyping is afforded the opportunity to construct their own history around the marginalized class. The upper class/caste culture finally absorbs and eradicates the people's culture, by subverting it. This comes clearly in the conversation between Jagannath and Panchanan Ustad. The Brahmins, according to Panchanan Ustad, are "*mlechchha*," or foreigners, who arrived and usurped indigenous people's culture. The Sanskrit *pundit* is threatened with expulsion from his residence by the furious Panchanan Ustad if he continues to utter Sanskrit *slokas*. The naïve individual's obstinate nature is subdued by the mother archetype Bangabala who coerces both Panchanan and Jagannath to cease the verbal confrontation.[85] Thus, Ghatak's authorial persona is revealed, as he consistently advocates for the value of integrity. In a socio-cultural context, the notion of integrity – whether artistic or on humanitarian grounds, is always championed by Ghatak in his films.

[85] Ghatak said, "In my films I rely mainly on the folk form. The great mother image in its duality exists in every aspect of our being. I have incorporated this in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* and also in *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo*" (94). See Interviews in *Rows and Rows of Fences*.

VII

On the way to the forest, over the *khoai* (barren land), Neelkantha vents his frustration over what he considers to be the "sham" of India's independence in 1947,[86] as Ghatak said once in his interviews, "Being a Bengali from east Pakistan. I have seen untold miseries inflicted on my people in the name of independence-which is fake and a sham. I have reacted violently to this and even in my last film, (*Jukti*)...I have tried to portray different aspects of this" (Ghatak "Interviews" 92). The occurrence of the Partition is one of the most brutal ironies of Indian independence. One of the most violent and divisive periods in South Asian history was the consequence of the liberation from British rule. The independence was intended to be a unifying and liberating event. But the Partition resulted in communal riots, mass migrations, and the loss of millions of lives. The liberation movement's inclusive and pluralistic ideals were contrary to

[86] He further said, "The present anarchic state of affairs prevailing in the country is the direct result of the shape of independence we got in '47. I've referred to it in my film. But I've left unsaid the phase we are now passing through, a period of neocolonialism, absolute neo-colonialism. I am afraid, if I had said these words my film would have become strictly political propaganda and not an art film. I have, however, posed the problem in human terms. I think my business is not to suggest any easy solution by means of tall talks or slogan-mongering. I believe, no one in our country has ever tried to grasp the problems in that way. If I can do that, or at least, throw the problem before them and say, 'Look, this is your problem. Now think — what is to be done?' — I'll think I've done enough" (96). See Interview with Ghatak in Rajadhyaksha and Gangar's *Ritwik Ghatak: Arguments and Stories*. He furher said, "The British Empire in India at that time was finished or totally broken down. The economy had collapsed because of the war. They were finished but for the Americans. Churchill, all these heroes had collapsed…They were at that time in a completely shaky condition. If we could have just continued the fight for some few more days, could have continued, sustained our vocal protest for some more days and could have sacrificed a few more lives, we could have compelled them to leave the country. But this deal/alliance/pact with Mountbatten, with the Britishers for power. It was tantamount to making some kind of a deal. They betrayed the country's whole National liberation movement. Gandhi was against it 'but' our National Liberation movement got hold of the seats in the name of independence. That's what I am trying to say, I have earlier also spoken about it and I repeat again, I scream and I will do so everywhere" (13-46). See Atanu Pal's *Ritwik Kumar Ghatak* published by Banishilpo.

the tragic outcomes. Political expediency and religious riots prevailed over the principles of unity and non-violence. Freedom fighters who had envisioned a unified subcontinent were compelled to observe the fracturing of their dreams. In post-independence India, the persistence of colonial legacies is another layer of irony. Colonial structures and institutions persisted in spite of the Britishers' departure. They were inherited from the British, and resulted in the perpetuation of the same hierarchical and centralizing patterns of bourgeois governance. The revolutionary ideals and inclusive aspirations of the freedom struggle were in contrast with these outcomes of the '*realpolitik*'. The attainment of political freedom did not result in social liberation for all segments of Indian society. The irony is that, despite India's political independence, its citizens were still engulfed by social and economic bondage. Hence, the post-independence space becomes again a waste land for Ghatak, and he literally throws alcohol on the camera-eye, the eye that perceives and makes perceivable the so called independence on the screen.

VIII

They encounter the Naxalite group, and that night in the forest, Neelkantha has an extended discussion with a young Naxalite rebel about Marxism and politics in India. In fact, the Naxalbari event and its aftermath served as an assault on the public's conscience. The movement's true impact had been more than human, despite the fact that it represented a radically new position in the then political space—it was a significant reflection on the Maoist ideologies prevalent in the then society. Between 1969 and 1971, a significant number of young people from Calcutta migrated to the countryside and acquired firearms in order to engage in conflict with the State (Gough 2-18). It was a remarkable demonstration of disillusionment with

the dominant social system, the ruling class, and the then parliamentary Left political establishment as well. It was a period in which leadership was accompanied by a rousing determination to bring matters to a head. We can only speculate as to the influence this had on Ghatak. Ghatak addresses the Naxalite youth as the "cream of Bengal." He says, they were "successful but unsuccessful at the same time." He further argued that they were, in fact, misguided, as he said, "I am also aware of a complete breakdown of moral values around me, especially among the younger generation of today" ("Interviews" 98). Ghatak had a different aspiration.[87]

Ghatak engages with the tenets of Marxist ideology and its implications for revolutionary praxis and societal transformation. As Sanjay Mukhopadhyay says, "The real Marxist must not be a good Marxist. His function is to put orthodoxy and codified certainties into crisis" ("Beejer Balaka" 226). Neelkantha's disillusionment with the subsequent Marxist movement reflects Ghatak's assessment of the inadequacy of revolutionary politics to confront the complexities of human existence and the fallacy of ideological dogmatism. He wanted to see Marxism as a philosophy rather than a mere political weapon.[88] Ghatak saw it from a point of view of not a politician. He was not supposed subscribe to a political ideology. A manifestation of the ruptures and contradictions of the nation-state project, Neelkantha's disillusionments draw attention to the erasure of alternative histories and the marginalization of subaltern voices.

[87] He realized that only two ways were left: "one is straight fascism, the other to do something in the Leninist way" (97). See Interview with Ritwik Ghatak in *Ritwik Ghatak: Arguments and Stories*.

[88] Ghatak mentions in one of the interviews: "The ideological base is fundamental Marxism. Marxism not in the sense of this party or that party. Marxism as can be seen philosophically, psychologically. Marx, Engels, Lenin—many clashes and conflicts have touches of their writings (in my films)...*Jukti Takko Aar Gappo* has ample touches..."(103). See Interviews in *Ritwik Ghatak:Arguments and Stories*.

Ghatak then presents another argument. He talks about India's unparalleled cultural heritage and a history extending over millennia, India's philosophical and religious contributions exacerbate this cultural richness. The nation's soft power and economic gains attracted outsiders. India's natural wealth is substantial. It consists of a wide variety of minerals, forests, and agricultural potential. This viewpoint of Ghatak was first seen in *Nagarik* where Sagar talks about these things to the elderly father figure. But, India was then confronted with substantial obstacles, such as poverty, inequality, and infrastructural deficiencies, despite an abundance of resources. Despite Neelkantha's arguments, the Naxalite rebel has only disdain for Neelkantha and dismisses him as a stupid drunken middle-class intellectual. Finally, Neelkantha says: "But I spoke the truth, when I said that I am confused. Maybe we are all confused. We are all moving aimlessly in the dark ..."

Neelkantha's alienation was a deliberate political exile in the forest. Ghatak establishes a teacher-student relationship between him and us, the audience in the forest in a rather antiquarian way. There is the peripatetic prophet and preacher; there is the Indian epic legacy of the hero's exit into the forest. He wished to associate and transfer to the future misguided generation, as represented by the boy. His objective was to disentangle the young Naxalite revolutionary from the concrete idealism that captured him. In the cross-fire between the police and the Naxalites, Neelkantha dies. His own physical death is transformed into a historical suicide. Although the moment is theatrical, certain activities at the conclusion were important and create a sense of mystification in our minds, as the questions that inevitably arise are not immediately answered. Traumatized Neelkantha's comic appearance is a result of his preoccupation with physical death. However, life was not a cherishable gift to Ghatak, and death was not incomprehensible. "Somehow I felt alcohol is the final road to salvation, engrossed in it, I really do" (Ghatak "Sukh

Asukh O Ritwik Ghatak" 65). He extends one arm and pours liquor into the camera lens. The comic intervention was intended to show his notion of the 'absurd.' His life was devoid of purpose. Survival was a better alternative to inaction. He required a rationale for his stoic existence, in which nothing was of any consequence. It is a manifestation of the dissatisfaction of a progressive mind at a juncture in life when it is recognized that all the missions and reformatory zeal have become a failure. The murder of that dream generates hatred, as the thought of a superstructure was his means of survival. He wanted an ideal controlling political body which too failed. His desire for conceiving himself as a participant intellectual with a purpose has failed as well. He preferred to be a loner instead of forming a sense of community. When he formed a group, he remained a loner. He informs us that the completion is impossible. The vision is distorted. There is no definitive access to the out-reaching utopianism. The pangs that enabled Ghatak to give birth to *Jukti* were unbearable, and the protagonist Neelkantha, who bears the "venom," is the means of praying for liberation to the absolutely corrupted class of intellectuals. His death is presented as an inevitable penance imposed on the class. However, both Ghatak and Neelkantha were not incomprehensible. Rather, they were isolated and unaccepted due to the specific class interest against which they are protesting. We can now comprehend that Neelkantha and Ghatak were not merely the members of a failed generation. Both were pioneers who were able to anticipate history, an era, and society. He continued to be an iconoclast. He remained a martyred hero who prophesied for the betterment of the future.

The plot of the film revolves around that persona who ultimately overcomes confusion and dies an unheroic death while having optimistic dreams. Ghatak dies after delivering the coda of the film; then the corpse is picked up and carried through a barren landscape by the police with the captives party in a single line moving briskly — to a marching tune. This style of

drumming for the tragic hero across an empty stage has strong resonances with Brecht, but there is all of Ghatak in it too. The dance of Death is precisely one of the most memorable scenes in Ghatak's films and may provide us with insight into his thoughts and emotions of his final years as a filmmaker.

Conclusion

> In *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo*, the elements were presented in their new raw form — reason, argument, story, song that hunger which is the basis of human creativity. So that Ritwik calls himself a humbug a civilisation sees how it is reduced to ashes. Yet there was no nihilism; he dies pleading with those who would annihilate their compassion along with their enemy. Our heroism will find itself trapped in mechanical crossfire of gunpowder, if it refuses to nourish itself on nature and history. For Ritwik, the heroic act the ultimate and the first sacrifice, has to be the act of union. (Shahani 55)

Thus, Ghatak demonstrates the fortitude required to confront "counter-discourse" of identity crisis and post-Partition fragmentation (Ghoshal 10-11). Every event depicted in the particluar spaces in the film is Ghatak's exclusive commentary on the realities he personally encountered as a communist and a representative of the confused and failed intelligentsia. He releases the image into what one might consider to be unmarked horizontality, a literal flatness as of many spaces of India, for his entire expressionist tendencies suggest. Such undifferentiated, bleached frames contrast deliberately with the evocative, tonally rich, symbolically moulded landscapes of his other films, including *Ajantrik*, *Komal Gandhar*, and *Titas*. Using what could be known as

Godardian techniques[89] in the film, Ghatak inserts documentary footage, also the abruptness of frontal address over against the fictional narrative so as to privilege the present (Kapoor 134). Whether the images of the city or of the landscapes or their inter-spacing – all reflect this. Ghatak - in the scene of peasant insurgency where he presents its anarchic nature in some very sketchy high-contrast, long-shot views, the landlord's gun-wielding henchmen shown in distorted close-ups; the caricatural, very Eisensteinian montage sequence where the incoherent trade-unionist is shown barking out his harangue in unison with a dog is another example. For all its inter-cut suspense, a mock-up battle so much as to say the meaning of the event lies beyond the mere *mis-en-scène*. Ghatak is completely aware that the historical moment can be formulated only in such a space-time conjunction, that the cinematic means are essentially capable of generating this space-time dialectic and thus redefining the ontology of the subject. He succeeds in creating the narrative space and the figural trajectory across it by interposing diagrammatic and dimensional models of spatial projection, so acting as a kind of manifest maze. The space is a vital area of operation, a place of doubt, of conjecture, of planned intention.

[89] Ghatak had seen Godard films; he spoke about this: "You see I agree with Jean-Luc Godard that anything which seems to an artist to be able of conveying his message is entirely valid — be it song or dance or newspaper headlines or commentaries or just about anything!" (72). See Film and I in *Rows and Rows of Fences*.