



Pre-rendered model of the universe of 'Omor'.

Owned, 'Omor' and a dystopian masterpiece

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

Writers are usually advised to shy away from words like 'masterpiece', 'classic', 'perfect' – or other bold terms and such, especially in an industry that tries to promote mediocrity as a given. Quite often, the lack of equipment, manpower and investment is cited as a reason. Yet, the music video for Owned's latest release *Omor* was perfect for what it set out to accomplish, even though it was made by just one man.

Before getting ahead of myself, Owned is a rock band from Dhaka that has continuously and diligently delivered nothing but excellence for the better part of a decade now. Consisting of A K Ratul, A K Samee, Fasihuddin Ahmed Itmam and Pritom Arefin, their signature, nuanced grunge sound is



Owned

with the song, I realised that it deals with the theme of immortality. I, myself had been designing what I had planned to be a web-series with similar themes. I thought it would merge pretty well."

The video, powered by live2web, follows the journey of an anthropomorphic pig through multiple dystopian realms. It also includes fully-rendered models of the band members themselves. "I took their photos



The band members' faces were rendered in 3D.

recognisable in a heartbeat. Yet, their latest music video helps establish new standards for the band.

"From the outset, we did not want to do a live-action music video this time," says frontman A K Ratul, who is also a talented music producer in his own right. "It was quite a hunt, looking for someone who understood our vision and could get the job done." The band came across animator Ali Arman Asgar, and this is where it instantly clicked.

Ali, who is the CEO of Locust Productions, worked a painstaking eight hours a day for four months to turn the concept for *Omor* into reality. "When the band came to me



An unused shot of the video's protagonist.

from different angles and rendered them together," shrugged the nonchalant animator, "In the end, it was the rendering that took

quite a toll." Even though the scenes were completed in about four months, the making of the video itself took an entire month for Ali's computer. Essentially, just one person accomplished the job of an entire studio full of animators.

"Ali was cordial when it came to our feedbacks," says A K Samee. "We told him to 'go nuts' with the style, but inserted references from our favourite pop-culture phenomenon for ourselves." Samee insisted that even though the easter eggs were put in the video for the band's own amusement, many found them and shared them online. "I am surprised that so many people picked up on those, as it would require multiple re-watches," said the drummer.

Owned shared that the video is the first of a trilogy, that would be made in partnership with Locust Productions. The band is also set to complete their trilogy of albums with *Owned 3*. "The pandemic has definitely hurt our plans, but we will finish the album as soon as we can," said Ratul. In the meantime, I will enjoy multiple re-watches of *Omor*.

"We create our own limitations as artistes"

- Masud Hasan Ujjal

SHARMIN JOYA

Masud Hasan Ujjal, a graduate of Charukola, is known for his unconventionality. He established himself as a painter before finding his feet as a director. His artistic inspirations are evident in his storytelling. Ujjal presents his works as visual poetry, with thought-provoking social and cultural messages, in the form of surrealist art. Ujjal's first film, *Unoponchash Batash*, was set to release this March, but it was delayed indefinitely due to the ongoing pandemic. In an interview with *The Daily Star*, the director shared his views on contemporary projects and shed light on ways that the industry can get back on track.

According to Ujjal, budget issues are not the definitive reason behind the deterioration of the television industry. "My project, *Rod Mekho Shurjomukhi*, was previewed in Pune as a visual text in classrooms," he shares. "To be frank, it was a low-budget production. I believe that talent and presentation are what matters, and the budget is not always the main obstacle."

For the past decade, Bangladesh's television industry is going through tough times. Tele-fictions lack morals and social messages. At the same time, the industry is struggling to draw audiences that are accepting of diverse stories and patterns. Sadly, many have grown comfortable with these practices. "We are all actually under the custody of capitalists. They have successfully captured everything, including the world of art," asserts Ujjal.

Ujjal also adds that the matter of survival often arises when artistes and creators confront the problems. "We create our own limitations as artistes," he says. "We all have to face the reality of survival, but the parameters have to be within the line. Otherwise, we cannot expect a swift growth in art."

The director believes that the race of having luxuries has blinded the society. In this process, the capitalists are not

only benefitting materialistically, but also technically, as it keeps people away from conspiracies that hinder the power of raising voices against all kinds of domination.

Nowadays, most stories on television lack depth. In line with that thought, Ujjal explains that in literature, films and television, there is no mark or clear vision about the contemporary social and political conditions. "The Renaissance era had an agenda of taking the art and culture from the middle to the modern age. It upheld the unhealthy compromises, for which a revolution took place," he says. "We are going through a 'Renaissance' of sorts, and the time highly demands an insurgency."

Ujjal adds that productions targeting the masses stir excitement, but are forgotten after a while. On the other hand, timeless stories are not widely applauded by audiences, but they are relevant throughout different ages. "Public interest is always harmful for art," he says. "Hyped stories are never responsible for bringing positive changes in taste. They don't make people realise their obligations towards preserving their culture."

According to the director, the patterns of filmmaking in Bangladesh are questionable. "We are either following European formats or Korean and Iranian narratives, to gain international funds and acclaim. Such practices have kept us away from creating our own language of cinema," says Ujjal. "We must be confident in ourselves and create our own path. We should not follow anyone else," he adds.

Ujjal further shares that OTT platforms, controlled by corporates, are not offering proper and fair appraisals to films. They are now trying to take advantage of the crisis the film industry is going through, as currently, cinema theatres are shut. "Our entertainment arena has to change and rethink certain patterns. Otherwise, we will face an irrecoverable lapse in no time," he concludes.



PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL



"Dance gives me the wings to fly towards freedom"

-- Rachel Priyanka Perris

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Gaudiya Nritya exponent Rachel Priyanka Perris has mesmerised audiences with her performances both at home and abroad. The dance scholar, who recently completed her Masters of Philosophy under the Gaudiya maestro Mohua Mukherjee, is currently a lecturer at the Department of Dance, University of Dhaka (DU). She conducted a webinar on *Sculptures of Gaudiya Dancers at Bangladesh National Museum* on the Facebook page of Gaudiya Nritya Bharati on June 24. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, the artiste talks about her recent online initiatives, her future plans and more.

Tell us a little about the webinar you conducted recently.

There are different ancient sculptures and statues at Bangladesh National Museum. If you look at them closely, you will see that some of them are standing in dance postures. The *Hasta Mudras, Sthanaks, Avinaya* and *Rasa* of these statues are very similar to Bangla classical dance, known as Gaudiya Nritya. The webinar highlighted the contribution of these statues and sculptures on Gaudiya Nritya.

When did you last perform on stage?

My last performance was on March 15 for *MujibBorsho* celebrations. Soon after that, the whole country went into isolation.

Have you been working on any videos or virtual performances lately?

I started uploading online videos of my performances from home from March 26. The first video I uploaded was a duet, where my friend Ayan Mukherjee played the Rabindra Sangeet *Akash Bhora Shurjo Tara* on sitar from India, and I performed from Bangladesh. I also released my performance *Krishnakali: A tribute to Rabindranath Tagore*, where I collaborated with Joyita. I also participated in the Gaudiya Nritya Festival organised by Mitrayan Institute of Dance and Research and British Council's event Women of the World (WOW), along with many other online performances and fundraising events. I plan to start my online classes at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy soon and I will also be conducting my regular lectures with my DU batches in the upcoming weeks.

How are you staying fit, keeping up your creative energy and spending time at home nowadays?

Being a lecturer and a professional performer, I seldom have the time to dance just for my own joy. Dance gives me the wings to fly towards freedom. Fortunately, staying at home has given me the opportunity to dive back into my passion for dancing and also focus on my fitness. I am also spending a lot more time with my family, especially with my parents.

Prospects of returning to the sets safely

SHABABA IQBAL

Recently, film, TV and web series shoots across the country were permitted to resume, with strict conditions. However, since coronavirus cases are still on the rise, many prolific artistes have not returned to the sets yet, due to safety concerns. As the entertainment arena tries to figure out how to move forward, several professionals from across the film and television fraternities are wondering not just when they might return to work, but also what the post-pandemic sets will even look like. *The Daily Star* spoke to a spectrum of film and television artistes about their thoughts and predictions regarding the future and the prospects of returning to work – safely – in a post-pandemic world, whenever that may be.

Redoan Rony: Productions are not going to be as largescale as they could be before. The make-up artistes and costume designers will have to be especially careful, since their jobs involve a lot of human contact. In addition, audiences will be apprehensive of going out to cinema theatres. The future of our film industry lies in digital distribution. Filmmakers will have to pitch their movies to streaming services, as they will be more prevalent than ever.

Mizanur Rahman Aryan: Even after the pandemic subsidies, the number of people on the sets will be vastly reduced. I will be shooting with a completely healthy team. In any case, as a director, I will keep pulse oximeters, blood pressure meters, glucose monitors and nebulisers readily available for my cast and crew members, once we begin working again. I have written some scripts that have indoor scenes and require very few actors. However, I have not compromised on the essence of the stories. Other than that, I have worked on some drawing animation short films with a team in Kolkata, through video conferences. I assume that it will take at least six more months for the circumstances to improve.

Afran Nisho: Although some shoots have started with social distancing and other such precautionary measures on the sets, I don't think those arrangements will be sustainable after a point. As a solution, I

imagine we will have to work with a team-based system. A small group of people will be shooting and quarantining together in a specific area for ten to fifteen days, and only return home once the entire project wraps up. They will have to stay in isolation in their homes for two weeks afterwards. People have been calling me for my shooting dates, but I have not committed to anything yet. I want to be able to support my family and do what I love, but only when everyone involved feels safe.

Sabila Nur: I have been in talks with my colleagues regarding a few Eid-Ul-Azha projects, but I have not made any actual decisions yet. Shooting as we know it will change in the future. We will not be travelling and working with an entourage of thirty to sixty people, like we used to. I hope that rigorous cleaning and disinfecting of the washrooms in the shooting houses become the norm, and actors start using their personal products to do their own make-up. On a positive note, I have been reflecting upon my own

work and the kind of scripts I want to choose, during this hiatus. I will be more energised and motivated once I resume work.

Bidya Sinha Mim: Acting is meant to be an interactive profession and we are used to being around large groups. Socially distant films are just not the same. The world of cinema is not doing well at all. It will take at least two years for the industry to recover from the pandemic. I don't think we can fully return to regular life, until a vaccine is available for the virus.

Arifin Shuvo: I worked on *Mission Extreme* for eleven months and it is my most challenging project yet. Sadly, the film's release was pushed back. Needless to say, this pandemic has caused me a lot of psychological distress, and I am not sure where our industry is headed. Frankly, I am not even thinking about work, as I need to stay home now for the well-being of my loved ones and myself. I hope that the virus will become less of a threat and there will be some concrete solutions in the next few months.



ILLUSTRATION: OISHIK JAWAD