

Artistes and FDC take a stance against obscene films

Will this be enough to save the film industry?

ERSHAD KAMOL

THE main criticism Dhalilwood-centric Bangla cinema faces today is that it is becoming increasingly vulgar and graphic. For the last few years, renowned actors and directors of the mainstream film industry have been taking initiatives such as human chain and processions to mobilise a movement against the ongoing obscenity and violence in Dhalilwood films. However these steps have not been fruitful. It should be mentioned that according to a notification by the Ministry of Information in 1985, only a few films were censored or completely banned by Film Censor Board (FCB) for portraying obscenity, crime, plagiarism etc. Its effectiveness comes into question with the rampant screening of obscene films in theatres across the country, especially in district towns. Recently, Bangladesh Film Development Corporation, better known as FDC, has taken another step to

keep the ongoing trend of obscenity and violence in check.

As part of their current initiative, the Managing Director of FDC, A.N.M Badrul Amin had a meeting with several artistes at his office. "Besides the social commitment, finances are also at stake here. When FCB bans a movie we have to face huge loss. Producers of the banned films do not pay us the services charges including reel, development, camera and editing costs, among others," said Amin.

FCB provided a list of artistes to be called at the FDC meeting. According to Amin: "We invited popular actors and warned them that if they are seen in vulgar or overly graphic movies, they would not be allowed in FDC. Moreover, we requested them to inform us if they are forced to perform in such scenes by the directors. We will have meetings with directors and producers soon."

Amin also said that even FDC officials have been strictly briefed to inform the management if



Manna

"questionable" scenes are shot at the FDC studios.

However concerned individuals do not believe that such steps taken by FDC are enough to control obscenity and other questionable elements in mainstream cinema. According to sources several producers and directors add 'cut pieces' after getting the green light from FCB, just to make some quick bucks. Sources also claim that the cut pieces -- full of obscenity -- are made at two other studios and private shooting spots, besides FDC. Hence it is really difficult to believe that only FDC can control cinema portraying horrific violence and obscene contents.

Actor SM Aslam Manna (who goes by 'Manna'), the current general secretary of Bangladesh Chalachitra Shilpi Shomity, said, "Popular actors and directors are always against such issues. We appreciate the initiative taken by FDC. But, it is not the only studio in the country. So, it's not possible to control obscenity and violence

through these initiatives alone. However, we do believe the culprits -- corrupt producers, directors and actors -- should be punished. Our observation suggests that stay orders can be obtained from lower courts, which allow screenings of uncensored films for at least a period of time before further action is taken against them. Sometimes, stay orders are obtained before the release of films. Which is why the amendment of Film Censor Act 2006 is not effective, though the act has provisions to punish for projection of films, display of posters and advertisements without certificates, starting from three months to a maximum of three years imprisonment and a fine of BDT 10,000. We want that the law enforcement agencies to ensure the proper implementation of laws regarding films."

Manna's views are shared by many, as most cine-goers would appreciate wholesome, entertaining movies.



PHOTO: STAR

BTV bringing about major changes in its programmes

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

With the aim to make the state-run TV channel, Bangladesh Television (BTV), more audience-oriented and to regain its greater acceptance among a wider range of viewers, the channel has rearranged its programmes, says a BTV official. In accordance with the plan, BTV is introducing a number of new programmes in the July-September session.

Several noted artistes including Mamunur Rashid, Momotajuddin Ahmed and Abdulla-Al-Mamun who were absent from BTV are making a comeback through some of the programmes.

New shows include educational and awareness generating programmes, TV plays, talk shows, English debates, magazine shows and more. Highlights of the programmes aired each day:

Sunday

Stories by acclaimed litterateurs like Abul Mansur Ahmed, Shawkat Ali, Hassan Hafizur Rahman and others are adapted for a TV series *Galpo Thekey Natok*, to be aired at 9pm. A talk show in English, *Heritage*, is to be aired at 10:30pm. On the 2nd Sunday of every month, a special programme on renowned personalities, titled *Swapno*, is aired at 11pm. Rehman Sobhan and Professor Abdulla Abu Sayeed have already been featured in the programme.

Monday

Shishor Kishor Moncho is a programme featuring theatre productions for children, staged at the BTV Auditorium at 6:40pm. *Protikhon*, a TV show focusing on issues regarding public interest, is aired at 9:30pm.

Tuesday

Duurdeshay Aponjon, aired at

7:30pm, features Bangladeshi expats. Re-run of hugely popular BTV programmes like drama serial *Shongshaptak*, is aired at 9:20pm. Talk show on economic issues, *Ortho Proshongo*, is aired at 10:30pm.

Wednesday

A talk show featuring celebrities, titled *Alor Pother Jatri* is aired at 9:30pm. The show is hosted by Kabori Sarwar. *Gronthokothon*, a programme on the book market, and *Shobor Jonyo Cinema*, a show on movies are aired fortnightly at 7:30pm.

Thursday

Intellectuals and experts face the audience and participate in dialogue in the programme *Jonotor Kotha*. Primarily the programme will cover 17 districts. Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, Selina Hossain, Mozaffar Ahmed and Abed Khan were present in the

first episode. The programme is moderated by Badiul Alam Majumdar and is aired at 7pm.

Friday

Talk show *Bhabbar Bishoy*, on issues prevailing in the contemporary society, is aired at 7:30pm. Popular singers of particular genres render different types of songs in *Moner Majhey Jey Shur Bajey*. Hosted by Sara Zaker the programme is aired at 10:30pm.

Saturday

A programme on folk songs, titled *Adi o Okritim* is aired at 10:30pm. The programme is hosted by Lalon exponent Farida Parveen. A TV play is aired at 9pm under "package programmes".



(From left) Momotajuddin Ahmed, Farida Parveen, Subarna Mustafa and Sara Zaker will be seen in different programmes on BTV

Discrimination at home, heroism overseas

Spike Lee to focus on black soldiers in World War II

AP, Rome

Spike Lee announced plans last Tuesday to make a movie about the struggle against Nazi occupiers in Italy during World War II that he hopes will highlight the contribution of black American soldiers who fought and died to liberate Europe.

The film will spotlight the courage of black soldiers who, despite suffering discrimination back home, offered a contribution that has so far gone largely unnoticed in other Hollywood movies, Lee said.

"We have black people who are fighting for democracy when at the same time are classified as second-class citizens," the 50-year-old filmmaker said. "That is why I'd like to do a film to show how these brave black men, despite all the



Filmmaker Spike Lee (L) and novelist James McBride

hardship they were going through, still pushed that aside and fought for the greater good."

Based on the novel "Miracle at St. Anna" by James McBride, the movie will tell the story of four black

American soldiers, all members of the Army's all-black 92nd "Buffalo Soldier" Division, who are trapped behind enemy lines in an Italian village in Tuscany in 1944.

Filming is planned in Tuscany, Rome and the United States, Lee said.

Shooting is expected to start by the beginning of 2008, said producer Roberto Cicutto.

"If you look at the history of Hollywood, the black soldiers who fought World War II are invisible," Lee said.

"I'm not a hero, the heroes are those buried in the American cemetery in Florence. I hope this movie will put positive spin on some of our activities here," recalled 82-year-old William Perry who, at 19, was an infantry soldier in the Buffalo Division.

Movie Watch

"Noy Number Bipod Shangket": A madcap comedy devoid of genuine laughs

KARIM WAHEED

Once upon a time there was an emerging writer whose stories and novels shed new light on everyday middle class people and their "seemingly mundane" existence. Armed with a unique, unpretentious and often wacky sense of humour, the writer was touted as (and rightfully so) an "alchemist" or a "phenomenon" by the who's who in the literary scene. His popularity escalated to a new zenith when his stories and novels were adapted into TV serials by skilled directors. A band of ace thespians breathed life to his characters, so much so that there was public mourning when a beloved hooligan from one of his plays died. For years the success story continued and then the obvious happened.

The writer was convinced that he was infallible and started churning out otherwise pointless publications as frequently as Imelda Marcos was buying shoes. Certain new stories had uncanny resemblance to previous ones. The supremely talented author decided to branch out and started making films, convinced that his skills behind the camera are as advanced as his flair for words. His comrades -- the directors and actors who had much to do with popularising his stories -- deserted him. Now he is left with a few mediocre films, some substandard TV serials and a new band of actors who are as impressive as sideshow acts at a local circus.

Humayun Ahmed's latest endearment *Noy Number Bipod Shangket* (written and directed by him) deserves this rather elaborate rant. Ahmed has issued a disclaimer saying it's a "meaningless film" (*Ekti Aarthik Chhobi*) and its sole objective is to make the audience laugh. The numbness of



Challenger, Diti, Rahmat Ali and child actors in the film

sitting through nearly two hours was not worthwhile however, as the film became a demonstration of crude fat jokes, overly familiar "Humayun Ahmed stunts" and jarringly overacting.

The film centres on an eccentric, lonely and wealthy (an alarming combo according to Ahmed's usual pattern) elderly man played by -- a regular feature in Ahmed's recent movies and plays -- Rahmat Ali. The circus starts with the elderly going berserk because his daughters and son would not visit him. His imbecile manager and the manager's even more moronic sidekick call up the daughters and son, and in between wails deliver the news of their father's demise.

The daughters, along with their

husbands and children, rush to their father's farmhouse (highly influenced by popular picnic spots) only to find him very much alive and crazy. The bookish, oblivious to the outer world, son also arrives.

Between uttering random words like "hyperspace" or lecturing the domestic help on advanced mathematical formulas (another chronic feature in Ahmed's creations), the son, Togor, finds time for no one. Not even a rather plump beauty -- who arrives unannounced at "Brishiti Bila" (the farmhouse) with her group of *qawwals* and starts boogying in the rain to a Rabindra Sangeet -- derails his focus.

After a couple of songs and more predictable shenanigans, the

madcap comedy with a few chuckles (at its very best) ends with two weddings.

Shadhin Khasru and Challenger (other familiar faces from the "Ahmed camp") do what they usually do. Asaduzzaman Noor does a cameo, raising a few eyebrows. It's unfortunate to see an accomplished actor like Jayanto Chattopadhyay's skills being unutilised. It's best to leave the "gawwali", (a *khichudi* of randomly placed Bangla and Urdu words) composed by S.I.Tutul, alone.

Produced by Impress Telefilm Ltd, the movie will have its world premier today on Channel i at 4:35pm. The film is also being released at Balaka and Star Cineplex, Bashundhara City mall.

Musical soiree Monsoon melodies in Sylhet

MOHAMMAD SHAFIQUL ISLAM

'Anandalok' and 'Rabindra Sangeet Shilpi Sangsta' of Sylhet arranged a musical soiree featuring monsoon melodies of Tagore at Sarda Hall in Sylhet city last week.

It was sunny throughout the day but a shower splashed the city in the evening, adding splendour to the ambience of the programme. Music enthusiasts took it as an active participation of nature.

Among the six seasons, *Borsa* holds special significance to Bengalis. Nature takes on a unique range of sounds and scenes. Though as a nation, we have a legacy of welcoming each season with different festivals, music, poetry and more, rain makes a profound impact on the psyche. Some celebrate the lush and bounty of nature while some reminisce fond memories of bygone rainy days with their beloved.

Not surprisingly, renditions of Tagore songs by 'Anandalok' and 'Rabindra Sangeet Shilpi Sangsta' illustrating nature and state of mind in *Borsa*, seemed to strike a chord with the audience.

There was a choral presentation by the artistes in the beginning. Apart from Rabindra Sangeet the programme also featured baul songs by Badol Baul. Artistes -- Rana Kumar Sinha, Ragini Sinha, Sumona Aziz, Protik Endo, Animesh Bijoy Chowdhury, Jyonto Bhowmick, Mursheda Nasrin, Rajesh Singh, Ruji Akbar, Mita Das, Ataur



Artistes render A Tagore song at the programme

Rahman, Biman Talukdar, Sajia Binte Rahi,

Tagore songs.

The writer is a Lecturer, Department of English, Metropolitan University, Sylhet

Buzz

"The Bong Connection": Predicaments of the Bengali identity

Anjan Dutt is embarking on a new voyage with his film titled *The Bong Connection*. Dutt describes his cinematic oeuvre as his "first experiment with directing an English language feature film out of the country." The film follows on the heels of two other directorial ventures -- *Bada Din* and *Bow Barracks Forever*.

Described as "a warm, hearted, hilarious drama about two men in this crazy global world," the film stars Shayan Munshi, Raima Sen, Parambrata Chattopadhyay and Piya Rai Chowdhury along with noted actor Victor Banerjee. The two central male characters are Andy (Munshi) and Apu (Chattopadhyay).

Twenty six-year-old Andy, a second-generation Bengali born and brought up in New York, is a talented guitarist with a proclivity for Indian classical and folk music, especially the Baul genre. He sets off to Kolkata and attempts to come to terms with the city's reality which is completely alien to him. At this point Sheela (Raima Sen) gets friendly with him and shows him around. Andy can neither adjust to the growing non-Bengali disco culture of Tantra, nor can he empathise with the pettiness and mediocrity of the traditional Bengalis.

Apu, in turn, lives in Kolkata and sees Bengali culture as obsolete. Apu soon moves to Texas, US. Making friends with Rita (Piya), he shares an apartment with his office colleague Chris, who is gay and with whom he finds it difficult to adjust to. Apu's boss Garry (Banerjee) is a Bengali immigrant transformed into a typical Republican American. Hard reality hits Apu when he is mugged on the streets of Houston -- which brings him face to face with the violent facet of his "Hollywood dreamland". Life in the US is a far cry from his secure, pampered home in Kolkata.

The film is essentially on a comic vein. Serious, important issues regarding globalisation are dealt through comic, humorous scenes. The style is wacky, neo and never verge on old-fashioned melodramatic sentiments.

Music director Neel Dutt has written the lyrics along with Anjan Dutt. The film is a delight for



A scene from *The Bong Connection*