## From Good to Terrible

Seeing the deplorable state of Bangladeshi films since time immemorial, it would not be wrong of the present generation to question the claims of our elders' assertions of a golden age of films in this region. The truth is that, till the 1980's, the Bangladeshi film industry was acclaimed for its commercial and alternative ventures that brought forward fresh visions and ideas.

"The days of social realism in celluloid during the '60s are now gone. Gone are the days of – 'Titas Ekta Nadir Naam' (1973). 'Surjo Dighal Bari' (1979) was perhaps the last of the Mohicans. In a poor third world country like ours, government being the most potent social organisation, the responsibility of this failure falls much on the government," filmmaker Tanvir Mokammel has said in his essay 'Problematics of Alternative Cinema in Bangladesh: An Introspection.'

Unfortunately for cine-lovers in Bangladesh, after a point, commercial filmmakers in Bangladesh began to follow the route laid out by their counterparts in neighbouring India. Crass, mass pleasing films, that were made and shown for the sole purpose of raking in the money, began to rule the roost. Constant development was no longer a priority; business maximisation was the only thing that mattered.

"When Hiralal Sen produced the first film of undivided Bengal in 1901, no one instructed him about the story, no one told him that the characters of his film had to be sketched in a particular manner or that there needed to be a set amount of elements in his films. Hiralal made his movies in his own way without feeling constrained by demands and wants of a second party," says noted filmmaker Manjare Hassin Murad.

Ironically, while our filmmakers continue to produce the same formulaic films with the same plot of a hero, heroine, villain, some songs and dance sequences often copied from Indian films, the cinematic landscape of our neighbours has undergone a massive change over the last few years. Indian filmmakers have successfully managed to integrate commercialism with intelligent filmmaking, breaking away from the stereotypes that were beginning to define them. While Indian filmmakers are striving to make a mark for themselves globally, commercial filmmakers in Bangladesh hold on adamantly to obsolete techniques of filmmaking.

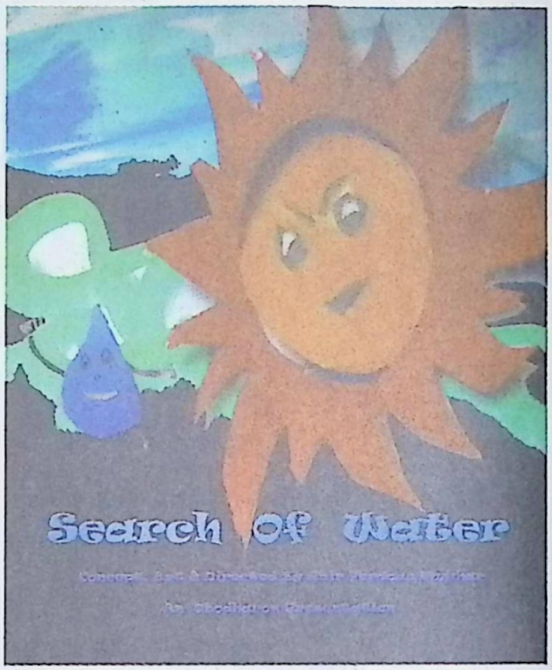





PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

*(Left)*
**Mohammad Abir**
**Ferdous Mukhor**

## The Seeds of Independent Filmmaking

The tradition of filmmaking in this region was very independent in nature. Films, in the beginning, were released as an expression of an individual's creativity, a visual testament of their artistic vision. Over the years, films became a platform for revolution. Filmmakers took to films to narrate the struggles faced by the Bangla speaking population in the hands of then West Pakistan. The cry for liberation was evident in every cultural form, whether it is books, films or music. Filmmakers like Zahir Raihan made optimum use of their films to state their rebellion against the Pakistani regime. By rejecting the conventions and rules set by the regime, filmmakers of that time declared their independence from the oppressive government.