

ASHFAQUE AHMED

Talks about Rajneeti



Ashfaque Ahmed is a well-known entrepreneur who has recently ventured into the world of film production, making his commercial debut with the much hyped 'Rajneeti' starring Shakib Khan and Apu Biswas. In a sitdown interview, he shared with us the makings of this film and his relatively new experience in this profession.

Where did the interest in making films come from? Are there any family members in this line?

I personally knew Iftekharul Alam, who was a close friend of my father. He was a pioneer in film production and the intention arose from there. Also, I grew up in Old Dhaka, where the environment emphasized on cultural elements like movies. Even though I don't have any direct family members who worked in the film industry, my mother had two cousins who were in BFDC, so there was some influence from there too.

Did you attempt any movie projects before?

The first movie-related project I attempted was a short film, which was an adaptation of a story by Mohammad Zafer Iqbal named *Raton*. We had to wait a year to get his permission, but the film ended up being well-received. It was featured in Calcutta's International Film Festival and also won 'Best Foreign Language Film' award in the Siliguri Short Film Festival. My first project was indeed a successful one.

What were your goals when producing *Rajneeti*?

Rajneeti was created keeping everything

"local" in mind. Everything, including production, post-production, staff, locations, music, and of course, the cast are from Bangladesh. I asked myself, why can't locally made films give us entertainment? Why can't we break out of the formula? When making this film, we focused on entertainment and making it believable, by not straying too far from reality. Bulbul Biswas deserves a lot of the credit as the director. He made each character shine and developed them excellently throughout the plot.

What would you say are the unique traits of *Rajneeti*?

Rajneeti is full of familiar places which the audience can connect with, making it different from joint venture films. That's a huge plus point. Furthermore, the audio of the film will be distributed internationally by Sony DADC. The movie will also be released to the Middle East and Far East. No other locally-made movies have been distributed to such an international level, especially through a big company like Sony.

Tell us a bit about the story of *Rajneeti*.

The story revolves around two families from old Dhaka, who have two opposing

leaders as their respective family-heads. Shakib and Milon are brothers, and Apu is the opposition leader's daughter.

Ultimately it can be called a mixture of a political film with a romantic genre.

Are you happy with how the movie has been received?

It's being received well so far. I would say the fans are coming to see Shakib and Apu together in a film again, who are much talked-about celebrities of recent times. The feedback is good as well, with halls outside Dhaka being houseful. I even had halls knocking us about wanting to run *Rajneeti*.

Popular opinion dictates that the quality of our film industry is deteriorating. What is your take on that?

I have always wondered why we can't have a truly entertaining, big-cast movie which attracts local audiences of all levels. The other day I heard someone saying that 80% of the earning from joint venture movies goes abroad. I think that's wrong. We need to invest in local films and keep the money in our homeland to develop our film industry for the better. Local people need to be invested in local films even more. There needs to be more emphasis on presenting a good story.

So you think reviving the industry is possible?

Absolutely! We have a large population of audience to make it possible. Movies have been a part of our culture since a long time. Keeping history in mind, I really do believe that producing excellent films is possible. We have done so before, perhaps in a lower budget, but we need to keep doing it even more.

Are you going to continue with this line of work?

Yes. I don't know how regular I can be, but if the opportunities arise, I will of course take up the challenge. This is my first time saying this in public, but I am working on a joint-venture which will begin from December. It is a Hollywood movie and I will be working as an associate producer for it.

Any final words before we wrap this up?

I want to thank my family for their support. Special thanks to everyone from my office. Their dedication is always a huge help. Thanks to you too! *Rajneeti* is a local product and I sincerely hope everyone enjoys it.