



RUBAIYAT HOSSAIN

“OPEN DOORS” FOR YOUNG DIRECTORS

Rubaiyat Hossain is a promising young director from Bangladesh, who has garnered many international accolades in film festivals all around the world. Her recent venture was in the Locarno Film Festival, where she attended the “Open Doors” Hub this year. Star Showbiz talks to the prodigy about the possibilities that such programs offer to young directors and producers all over the country.

Could you explain the Open Doors initiative for emerging filmmakers in Bangladesh?

Open Doors is an initiative taken by the Locarno Festival which concentrates on young South Asian producers and directors. Open Doors Hub is basically a co-production market, where directors can go with their screenplay to find their European co-producers. Last year, I was in the Open Doors Lab, where they teach you everything about producing a film: from how to apply for funds, how to raise financing, how to go about finding the appropriate help for your film. Open Doors Screening is where directors can showcase their films. Last year talented directors such as Mostofa Sarwar Farooqi, Kamar Ahmed Simon, Sara Aftreen, Abu Shahed Emon, Aadnan Imtiaz Ahmed and Ishtiaque Zico participated in Open Doors. This is an excellent initiative for upcoming directors.

What was the difference between your recent visit to Locarno last year with the one this time?

Well, when I visited last year's Open Doors program, we only had a “treatment”, which I developed over the last one year as a Producer/Director/Writer (because I am doing all of these in my

movie). I developed the film, applied to Berlinale Script Station for script consultancy, we went to the Hong Kong Film Financing Forum, and then we applied to Open Doors again this year.

Is the Script Station part of the Berlinale Talents program?

It is indeed. It is one of the many parts of the program, where about 3000 applications are received from all over the world and 200 are selected in Script Station, Documentary Lab, and Short Film Station. If you're selected in any of these, you will be a part of the entire Berlinale and learn a lot. The same can be said for the Open Doors initiative.

If someone from Bangladesh wants to apply now, what is the procedure for that?

The good news is the Open Doors team has been visiting Bangladesh for two years. They will come this year on November/December and do a presentation on how to apply, and the application deadline for next year's festival is in February. However, I encourage everyone to apply early, as they prioritize directors who have everything ready early. If your screening, financing and cast is ready, it will be a more complete application. It will also help if you already have a local producer to help with the finances.

People in Bangladesh have received international awards before. What do you think is different when it comes to the recent accolades?

Of course, we have received awards before. However, I feel that there were huge gaps between them. The likes of Kamar Ahmed Saimon, Saad Abdullah and others are winning accolades regularly, and it definitely helps create buzz and encourage other promising filmmakers to participate as well. *Live from Dhaka* was screened and highly acclaimed in the Rotterdam Film Festival, which is indeed a very big deal for us. Zico's film was screened in Venice, and Kamar got a huge grant from the government. There is a lot to look forward to, but at the same time we have a long way to go.

As you said, we have a long way to go. What do you think held us back in terms of filmmaking?

There was a time when the entire middle class looked away from cinema because of the sudden decline in quality. Cut-pieces, low quality films and the miserable state of halls were contributing factors. It needed government intervention to bring forth positive change, but we are recovering and making good cinema now. We had good films pre-71, but we never gath-

ered enough momentum to run with it. Every film festival has different characteristics to it, which needs to be understood in order to successfully participate in them. What do you think can be done in order to make the knowledge more widespread to our youth? Which international film festival should they start with?

I think they need to be exposed more to the film festivals. The more one goes for example, I participated in the Goa Film Bazaar organized by the NFDC (National Film Development Corporation of India) in 2011 with the project *Diary of a Housewife*, a film that I never did because I used a lot of the same resources in *Under Construction*. I think the Goa Film Bazaar is a good starting point for newcomers, and they have extended their application deadline for September. They have a great thing called “Industry Screenings”. 200 films are curated over anyone can pay a fee to put their film up there. The curators will then select 20-30 of the films as “Film Bazaar Recommend”. The more one is in touch with various film festivals around the world, the more likely they are to produce films that are in conformity with industry standards.

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Interviewed by Rafi Hossain