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DHAKA FRIDAY  
FEBRUARY 16, 2018  
FALGUN 4, 1424 BS

28

## Life in his Words

**PRIYANKA CHOWDHURY**

Every Bengali family can probably pull a beautifully comforting and familiar association with food and cricket in their everyday life. Young filmmaker Abrar Athar utilised these elements well to tell a story of an urban middle

the industry. As for his formal training, Abrar has a degree from Asian Academy of Film & Television (AAFT). "Film school teaches you the grammar of film making but it is life that inspires you," says Abrar. He describes his mother as strict. "She was very upset when I failed class five," Abrar

narrate a real story. He emphasised on knowing the characters so well that the audience of any country would be able to relate to them, because human emotion is universal. Through the hurdles of life Abrar believed that somehow cricket and food made everything better. His film banks on these comfort pockets which elevate the hopes of life.

Success stories are incomplete without the associated stories of struggle. Abrar says that he had trouble sharing his vision with others. Things he hoped to achieve in his work were quite unfamiliar to many people. "They said my characters were flawed, but that was the point," he explained. He wanted to convey that nobody is perfect and it is the imperfections that make his characters distinct. "I wanted to see if an authentic story can communicate with the world," says Abrar. Speaking of authentic cinema, Abrar gives the example of another film "Live from Dhaka" by Abdullah Mohammad Saad which won best director and best actor award in 2016 Singapore International Film Festival and has an official selection in Rotterdam.

"Life in other words" was an ambitious project for Abrar. He bet all his money on his debut film with a hope that it would go to places. He had been rejected from five festivals but eventually it did very well. The film made it to the premiere at the San Jose International Short Film Festival 2017. Prior to that, his film was screened at the Bahamas International Film Festival, Around International Film Festival in Paris, Gold Movies Awards in London, as well as several other reputed film festivals around the world. The film has also been awarded

for Best Short and Best Screenplay by the Gold Movie Awards and Best Trailer by Around International Film Festival.

Abrar agrees that the global prospect of filmmaking for young Bangladeshis is limitless. With the advancement of technology there is nothing that can stop ambitious makers from reaching out to the world if they have the right intentions. It is always easier said than done, but through Abrar's film he has proved that a simple but comprehensive narrative can attract the attention of audiences around the world. Abrar feels authenticity is key when it comes to filmmaking. Reality is stranger than fiction so if the elements of real life are well narrated, a film is bound to do well. Experiencing actual human emotions widens the perspectives of any creative person.

Much of Abrar's film could be classified as visual comedy. A contrasting narration to the visual is the treatment that he used in his film. His work has been compared to filmmakers like Wes Anderson and Fernando Ferreira Meirelles by reviewers of his film. However, he says that he tried to avoid their style consciously because the sets were different. Despite the conscious attempt, a touch of his inspiration is evident in his work. He describes what about stories amused him and recalls how he dealt with boredom. Part of it was reading, and while doing so he incorporated voices in his mind. It was a habit that amused him in his childhood that continues even today.

Although Abrar mentions that his busy schedule and social medium have taken him away from books, reading is one habit that definitely has built his base. As per his essentials, he says

music plays a central role in his work. He divides his life into before and after Kurt Cobain. His work mode is set according to the type of music he listens to at that time. Whether it's a commercial or a film, he always thinks musically. He used New Orleans Jazz score in his native story. The juxtaposition of the two is ought to be interesting. Pointing out the importance of having time for oneself he says, working out is his zone. Although it is difficult for him to make time but he wishes to put back exercise in his busy schedule.

He had some delightful experiences in the international film festivals. Abrar says the San Jose International Short Film Festival 2017 was a competitive one, while the Bahamas International Film Festival premiered films like The Florida Project and was attended by internationally acclaimed directors. Abrar mentions, "Each of the films shown in these festivals had an authentic story." Watching his film among these well-known names was a definite moment of joy. It was a learning and sharing opportunity.

Abrar says he does not only make films for international festivals. He believes cinema is global but he is keen to release his film for the Bangladeshi audience as well. "We've shown our film to a test audience in Bangladesh and the results are good. We hope to open it to the wider audience by summer," states Abrar.

As parting words of advice to individuals considering a career in filmmaking, Abrar says to always be honest, authentic, and sincere about your intentions and your work. He feels there are many real stories in Bangladesh which are waiting to be explored.



Abrar Athar

PHOTO: SALIM SADMAN SAMOY

class family in his debut film "Life in other words".

Sipping through his cup of espresso, the writer, director, editor, and co-producer of the film, Abrar, spoke about the inspirations that made him want to become a part of

says smiling. He can brush it off now but surely it wasn't easy then.

Through his challenges, Abrar learnt to step out of his comfort zone and explore life. According to Abrar it is vital for a filmmaker to do the research on the characters in order to

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