

THROUGH THE EYES

SUCHANDA

My Times of Allegiance

Noted actor and director Suchanda is an embodiment of brilliance and grace. Her iconic performances have enthralled audiences and critics alike. She is the recipient of some of the most coveted awards of the country including 'Bangladesh National Film Award' for Best Director and 'Standard Chartered-The Daily Star Celebrating Life Lifetime Achievement Award'. The actor celebrated her birthday on September 19. Star Showbiz wishes her a very happy birthday and many more successful years ahead.

NOSTALGIA ENSHROUDED

Ever since there were cinema halls available for the commons' entertainment, I used to watch movies of Shuchitra Sen. With her magical charm and mesmerizing acting, she seemed somewhat like an angel from out of this world to me. But belonging to a conservative family, it was difficult to go to cinema halls frequently for me. Parents back in those days would hardly allow their children to watch movies, and even if they did, they would check if the movie contained anything inappropriate for minors beforehand. I was lucky that my parents allowed me to watch a good number of Shuchitra's films. My mother Dr. Begum Zahan Ara, a scholar disciple of Kolkata's Lady Brabourne College, had a deep affection for the arts and culture. She used to be an acknowledged writer herself. My father A S M Nizam Uddin would also encourage me and my siblings to take part in cultural activities. I was the eldest of their six children. I was given singing, dancing and even sewing lessons in my childhood. At one point, we had to move to Dhaka due to my father's government job needs. In Dhaka one of his close friends, Kazi Khaleque, requested my father to give him some of my photographs. Shortly after, Shuvash Dutta approached my father with an acting proposal for me in one of his films. Shubhash kaku was so confident about my chances in the film industry, my whole family was left in a point of confusion whether to allow me or not. Eventually, my family agreed, and I was set to make my big-screen debut. But I could hardly appear on the sets right away, as a whole bunch of screening and voice-over pretests were waiting for me to pass through. After all the shenanigans, I was finally selected as the lead female actor for Shubhash Dutta's 1966 classic hit *Kagojer Nouka*. That first 'Lights - Camera - ACTION!' followed by the first shattering of the claps still reverberates inside my ears, like it was yesterday. I had given a perfect shot right on my very first take, which would actually be the last scene of the film. The whole cinema crew clapped and cheered for me. Shubhash kaku would only smile, as if saying - "See, what a gem I have discovered!" There was

a song that portrayed a scenario where I was having butterflies in my stomach, as my prince charming was about to come to my house. I was pouring tea for him from a kettle and as my bangles jingled, nervous, I sang: 'Na omon kore aar bejona, ei ektu porei she ashbe ghore, amay koro na anmona!' The lyrics were written by late Syed Shamsul Haque. While shooting this scene, I cut my hand badly in the bangles' edges. And till this very day I carry a scar of that cut right below my left wrist, like a precious insignia. However, this poor debutant had no clue of what was actually being recorded, how she actually looked like in the rolls of 35 mm. Finally, Shubhash kaku called everyone for an experimental screening. The whole crew gathered in the hall, and as the lights went down with total silence, I encountered that breathtaking moment of watching myself in the big screen, for the very first time! Lost in a spectral ambience, we saw the whole footage of that romantic song,

trees. The scene required the whole team to get up hours before sunrise, as the director needed a foggy and mystical serenity. We hardly had enough technology to create artificial fog and dawn-like low light. We artists would sometimes cover ourselves in burkha and go to the halls to see the reaction of the audience. My film *Nayantara* was running in the halls. As the song featured the female lead crying for her lover in a holy mausoleum, the audience in the hall suddenly started to smell the perfume of 'aagarbati' in real-time! It turned out that the hall authority had actually arranged to burn perfumed sticks to create a like-like experience. Then we saw some incredible craftsmanship from the set-designers during *Behula*, coming up with sets crafted identically according to the legend of *Chand Shauddagar*. And I remember how I had put my life on the line, as helpless Behula floated on a fragile raft amidst deadly river streams, only because my

launching event of a film, our honorable State Minister Tarana Halim shared the idea of having an actual self-sufficient industry. I would also like to state that our whole multitude of artists is deeply indebted to our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The role she is playing to preserve our cultural harmony and uphold the grandeur is undoubtedly marvelous. As a director, I tried myself to break some of the existing barriers with my film *Hajar Bochor Dhore*, which won the *National Film Awards* in six different categories. We did not have so many awards before. Our only trophies were the big red signboards in front of the cinema halls that said HOUSEFULL.

DEAR TO MY HEART

As I have said, I am a loyal admirer of Shuchitra Sen. I love all of her films. I love the acting of Dilip Kumar, Uttam Kumar, Roger Moore, Sofia Loren, Shahrukh Khan. *Jibon Theke Neya* is a film very dear to my heart. Satyajit Ray's *Opur Shongshar* is also another favorite film. I am a big fan of Humayun Ahmed. I was fortunate to be his close acquaintance. Tagore's songs help me release my stress and anxiety. The song *Jodi Tor Daak Shune* is almost like an anthem of my life.

FOR THE MEMOIR

I think we as a nation often forget to pay the homage that our national heroes deserve. The whole world knows India for Satyajit Ray. He is, in fact, a figure unforgettable. But what about our Zahir Raihan? Where is the recognition that he procured through his magic with the camera? Zahir Raihan was the maker of the then Pakistan's first ever color movie *Sangam*, and the first cinemascope movie *Bahana*. After his disappearance, many distributors conspired to snatch the proprietorship of his films. And now we do not even have all the reels of his works in our film archive, works that are actually worth treasuring as national assets. The precious negatives that were the brainchild of a true genius have been eaten by insects and have rotten in the humidity of irresponsible laxity. And I will not be surprised if the next generation does not even recognize who Zahir Raihan was. This would be the price we pay for own indiscretion. Anyway, a promising sight of current times is the crowd of book lovers that we see during the Ekushey Book Fair. I would request all the readers and fans to read quality literature, and know how the pillars of our national culture had been constructed. The nation needs to realize what and whom we have lost to come to where we are right now. A lot of precious efforts have gone in vain already; and we cannot afford to lose the ruins and remainings.



And by the time the reel rolled over, I had tears in my eyes I could barely hold. In a trance-like state I could listen to everyone clapping, cheering - "We have found our own Shuchitra Sen!" This way an inexperienced newbie called Kohinoor Akhter became the national star - 'Suchanda'. I was given this screen name by beloved Shubhash kaku.

THRIVE, INGENIOUS!

After *Kagojer Nouka*, I got the offer from Zahir Raihan to act in his film *Behula*, which would also be *Nayokraj Razzak's* debut film. It was a time when we barely had any promotional campaign or commercial approach. Artists' and crewmembers would dedicate themselves towards creating something memorable and beneficial for the society and culture. For example, there was a scene in *Anowara*, where the hero recites the Holy Quran sitting on a boat and his lover peeps on him hiding behind bamboo

director had instructed me to do so. We did not have today's plethora of dummies, dollies or cranes, but we had courage, and with true dedication, that was just enough.

HEARTACHE OF ARTISTE

One thing I want to clarify is that a producer's job is not only providing financial support. Those who invest in films just for making profits are not worth calling producers. For me, they are mere film-businessmen. A producer's primary job is to understand the impression of the story and then figure out whom to put in the gaffer's chair, where to attain proper shooting facilities and how to bring the audience towards the film. The commercializing of art has caused many talented producers and directors to step back from the industry. There is also the sad truth of video piracy. Until these obstacles are eliminated, our film industry will continue to struggle. Recently on the