

COVER STORY

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GRACE



In her career that vouchsafed over 200 films, Dhallywood diva Champa cast a glamour charm that left generations of film lovers spellbound for over decades. The five time 'National Award' winner actor retains a grand filmography that consists era-winning films like 'Padma Nadir Majhi', 'Bheja Chokh', 'Moner Manush' and many more. The insightful artiste reminisces the golden times of her career in this issue's cover story.

Rafi Hossain: We are elated to have Champa, the gorgeous and evergreen actor of Bangladeshi films with us for today's interview!

Champa: Thank you! I am also stoked that you remembered me so cordially. I even dressed up with a touch of fusion to present myself differently today (laughter).

Rafi: You look stunning! So, let us start with your stepping into the media scene. It took you comparatively longer than your elder sisters to appear on the silver screen. What was the reason behind this?

Champa: I never really saw myself becoming a film star in my early days. I would often go to the shooting spots to see the wondrous technology and mechanisms functioning all along. To see so many energetic people working with such efficiency was euphoric. Also my sisters were the hit actors of their times and watching them being surrounded by fans all the time had always been fascinating. Once in a shooting spot, a person came over to me and whispered - 'Sister, what do you stars normally eat?' (laughter). However, for a long time I somewhat preferred to live a trivial life with less spotlights

pace. Later, I worked with prominent directors like Atiqul Hoque and Mustafa Monwar. I did *Ekhane Nongor* with Hanif Sanket, which was a huge success and many of its dialogues famously reverberated in the common peoples' lives for days. My sisters were astonished too; they would wonder when I became so savvy! I always admired the talent of Bobita and Suchanda apa, but I never tried to imitate them. I wanted to make a name for myself with my uniqueness.

Rafi: And how did you make your silver screen debut?

Champa: I was already married with a daughter, when Suchanda apa approached with the offer for *Tin Konna*. The film had roles of three sisters. I had to persuade my husband a lot, but finally he agreed to let me act in the film. Suchanda apa actually convinced my husband that this would be my first and last film (laughter). Although it was my first time, I was not nervous or shaky at all. Actually seeing all my known people on the sets had given me an ease. Perhaps, I was yet to realize the significance of playing one of the lead roles at the time.

hardly seen. Our industry would see better days if such true artists of the past were alive.

Rafi: You have been in the industry for such a long time. Have you never thought of directing films?

Champa: I did consider taking a shot with film direction once or twice. But I backed off because I felt that I needed to learn more about the science.

The contemporary

scenario has largely evolved and attained much more diverse colors. When I was at the peak of my acting career, I did not have enough time to try out directing. And now I think I would have to learn it all over again to match with the modern vibes. I would rather skip the challenge. I am satisfied with my identity as an actor, and I do not wish to risk the acceptance.

Rafi: You had been at the peak of your career for almost a decade. If I may ask, do you now feel any emptiness or miss those busy times?

Champa: Well, ups and downs are parts of every artistes' lives. Good times do not last forever for anybody. Many factors, like age and popularity, determine how prolonged the period of success will be. In my case, I would say I had been the victim of some dirty politics. Otherwise, I might have enjoyed a few more years in front of the lights and cameras. Also, it is difficult for female actors to stand their grounds when there is a definitive patriarchal dominance in the industry. Then there is a lack of creativity in our scripts, due to which only younger actors mostly get to play the lead roles. In Bollywood, I see Juhi Chawla, Madhuri Dixit and Tabu still playing key characters in some fantastic movies. But here, age becomes like a burden for actors; even if you have much more in yourself to give to the audience, you hardly get enough opportunity. But I do not really miss those times, because I am always occupied with my family and friends. It is true that perhaps in the lazy afternoons I still like to wonder if I could play in this film or play that role differently, since age and experience truly enable artists to rediscover themselves. But that is just about it.

Rafi: But still, I would say that you and your sisters have been lucky to work with maestros like Zahir Raihan, Satyajit Ray and Buddhadeb Dasgupta. Can we hear bits of your experience of working in 'Lal Darja'?

Champa: Sure. But before that, I would like to talk about how I got engaged in *Padma Nadir Majhi*. There was a party in Bobita apa's residence, where I first met Gautam Ghosh. But I did not yet know him. I saw a thin, tall guy with long hair, staring at me without even blinking. I was wearing a miniskirt at the party, and I felt so uncomfortable that I asked



Bobita apa who that man was. She said, 'That's renowned director Gautam Ghosh! He has been looking for a new heroine for his next film. Perhaps he has found something in you!' This made me even more nervous! Later we were introduced, and he requested me to invite him to my place because he had heard that I was a good chef. He also added that I may

(laughter)! wear a saree and not put any makeup. So, I followed. On the day of the invitation, I attended the door for the guests coming right from the kitchen, and so my face was covered with sweat.

When I opened the door, Gautam held a pause for a long while and kept staring at my natural, sweaty face. He did not express anything at all about the film on that day. We all just ate together and chatted, and then he left, keeping me befuddled about what was going on in his mind. All curtains unveiled the next day when I received a phone call from him. He said I was perfect for his next film; I only needed to put on some weight. At that time, I had a glamorous image in the industry. Many advised me to not take Gautam's offer; they said playing such an impoverish, penniless character will ruin my career. But I told myself that I am much more than my beauty and glamour, and took the risk. This way I came closer to one the best directors of the Indian subcontinent. After the success of *Padma Nadir Majhi*, I got the offer from Buddhadeb Dasgupta. Bappi Lahiri was the music director of *Lal Darja*. He received a prestigious award for the film, and so he called me his 'lucky artist'. Buddhadeb da had a very forthright attitude. While elaborating my role in *Lal Darja*, he said that the character had to have very distinct facial expressions. It required me to pour down deep heartache through my gazing and lip curves. The film was based on a poetry, and it had many surrealistic aspects. He even halted the shooting for hours once because I was laughing aloud just before going to shoot a sad scene. He said, 'You have gone out of your character, go and stay alone for sometimes. Do not talk to anybody.' The strictness of such talented directors taught us some great lessons. After *Lal Darja*, Sandip Ray casted me in his Hindi film *Target* to play one of the lead roles with Om Puri. I had to learn to speak Hindi for that film. The consequences of *Target* brought me to meet legendary Indian actor Anupam Kher. He invited me to go to India and take

LIKE A GEEFUL CHAPTER

shining. My father had always been encouraging. It was a little hurtful when some directors stated that my two sisters being actors, does not automatically prove that I can be an actor too. So, I took it as challenge and began to practice acting behind closed doors. None of my sisters had any clue that I was rehearsing scripts with the pillows as my dummy heroes (laughter). Now, when I look back to those days, I find it soothing that despite having no opportunity of academic training like current times, our enthusiasm allowed us to hold on to our spirits regardless of everything else. Soon enough, I was lucky to receive an offer from Abdullah Al Mamun. It was for a drama called *Doob Shatar*.

Rafi: Was it the very first offer that you received?

Champa: No, I had received a good number of film offers but I rejected those. *Doob Shatar* was one of my big breaks, after which I collected myself a strong