

Badhon on playing Muskan Zuberi in Srijit Mukherji's thriller adaptation

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Dr Azmeri Haque
Badhon won the 2nd runner-up title at Lux Channel i Superstar 2006, before making her way into acting. She is also a non-practicing dentist.

The celebrated Bangladeshi artist will be playing the role of Muskan Zuberi in acclaimed Indian director Srijit Mukherji's first Hoichoi original series, "Robindronath Ekhane Kawkhono Khete Aashenni", based on Mohammad Nazim Uddin's Bangladeshi thriller novel of the same name. Other cast members include Anjan Dutt (Kharaj Khasnobis), Rahul Bose (Nirupam Chanda), Anirban Bhattacharya (Ator Ali) and Anirban Chakrabarti (OC Tapas Sikder).

This series is among Hoichoi's slate of 25 new originals, for their fourth year. In a recent video interview with *The Daily Star*, titled *A & E Talk with Elita*, Badhon shared her experience of working on the project and more.

Initially, Srijit Mukherji wanted to shoot this thriller adaptation in Bangladesh, with an entirely Bangladeshi cast. The director has said that he always wanted to cast Badhon in

the role of Muskan Zuberi. "I received a few Whatsapp messages from Srijit Mukherji at the beginning of the pandemic. He wanted to speak to me about the role. I was in self-isolation at the time, and I genuinely thought I was hallucinating!" explained Badhon. "I didn't believe it. I even ignored his texts, until producer Shahriar Shakil got me in contact with him."

Badhon read the novel right after speaking to Srijit Mukherji, and even started rehearsing scenes from the script. "Srijit Mukherji recorded the dialogues of my co-artists and sent me the recordings through Whatsapp, so that I could rehearse," she added.

However, the director's plans of working on the series with Bangladeshi actors were interrupted by the pandemic. As a result, he decided to move forward with the series in India, with an Indian cast. At the time, he wanted to cast Paoli Dam in the role, but that did not work out due to scheduling conflicts. Eventually, Srijit Mukherji went back to his first choice — Badhon.

With the assistance and cooperation of the High Commissions of Bangladesh and India, Badhon went to Kolkata in December 2020, to begin working on the project. The cast and crew are shooting with all the precautions, including Covid-19 testing, when needed.

"I am thankful to the author Mohammad Nazim Uddin for creating a wonderful, multifaceted character like Muskan Zuberi — every actor waits for a role like this," shared Badhon. "I am



PHOTO: STAR



Badhon in "Robindranath Ekhane Kawkhono Khete Aashenni"

completely fascinated by her."

Badhon has been visiting the sets, even on days where she does not have any scenes to shoot, just to watch the others at work. "All the actors in the series are brilliant. Besides, working with the likes of Srijit Mukherji, Rahul Bose and Anirban Bhattacharya is the experience of a lifetime," she said. "Rahul Bose is incredibly humble. As a co-actor, he made me feel really comfortable on the sets. I don't have any direct scenes with Anjan Dutt, but there is a point in the climax of the story, where audiences will get to see me in the same frame as him, alongside all the other characters, which is exhilarating!"

Badhon also took up singing for the project, since the character of Muskan Zuberi, an ardent admirer of Rabindranath Tagore, is a good singer. "I am not a very musical person," shares Badhon. "But I learned singing for this role, right from the basics, for three months. Starting from *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa*, I learned to play a few, easy songs on the harmonium. I may not be good at singing still, but I wanted to get the body language and the essence of the character right. I will be lip syncing to another singer's voice in the series."

Moreover, Badhon is thankful to Hoichoi for giving her a platform to

explore her skills. "Our industry has plenty of talented and eager individuals who want to do good work, but we lack the production and the technical support," she said. "To that end, I appreciate Hoichoi's commitment to supporting young, promising artists."

In 2018, Badhon received the complete guardianship and general custody of her only daughter, after a hard-fought legal battle. She spoke about that day in her life, in an emotional moment during the interview. "It was raining heavily on the day of the final verdict, and I felt that Mother Nature was celebrating with me," shared a tearful Badhon.

She further said, "Sadly, women and girls in our society hardly get the opportunity to learn how to speak up for their rights. When girls who have gone through difficulties in their lives, come up to me and say that I give them the courage and confidence to fight for their rights, I feel an immense sense of accomplishment." She further added that motherhood gave her the strength to fight against all odds and stand firm on her beliefs.

On the work front, Badhon also wrapped up director Abdullal Muhammad Saad's forthcoming project. She described working with him as one of her biggest learning experiences.

Gazi Rakayet on his latest film, "The Grave"

SHAH ALAM SHAZLI

Renowned actor and director Gazi Rakayet started his career on stage, where he honed his craft as an actor. He won Bangladesh National Film Award for Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Dialogue and Best Story for his debut directorial "Mrittika Maya" (2013) and the Best Supporting Actor award for his role in the film Anil "Bagchir Ekdin" (2015). His film, "Gor" (The Grave in English), was recently released, to much acclaim. It is said to be the first English feature film released in the country. The esteemed director talks to *The Daily Star* about his latest project.

What made you select the script for "Gor"?

I had made a tele-fiction with the same story a while back, and since then, I had dreamt of making a feature film with it. I had wanted to highlight our country to international audiences with the film, and the script was perfect for the cause.

Why did you decide to release the film in English?

Many of our films are earning praise internationally, after they are given proper subtitles in English. I thought that a film natively in English would be easier for audiences abroad to grasp. Some may think that it was for show-off, but in reality, it was necessary — so we shot in both English and Bengali. I believe that "Gor" will be appreciated in the international arena, because of this very reason.

Where did the film's shooting take place?

The shooting took place in my home village of Shinepukur in Dohar. We cleared space in a jungle situated there, and created the set there, overlooking a *char*. Uttam Guha was the art director for the film, and I must say, he did a brilliant job. We shot the film in October and November.

Tell us about acting in "Gor". Why did you cast yourself in that particular role?

That role was one of the most important ones in the film, and I will admit that there were many artists who could have played it. However, would they have given enough time to that role? Maybe they would, maybe they wouldn't. A lot of homework and consideration was needed for the role, so I decided to take matters into my own hands. Now, I am glad that I could give my all to the role.

How challenging was the film to complete?

It was doubly challenging to complete, as it was shot and dubbed in both English and Bangla. Moreover, it is a government granted film, so the expectations were also very high. We rehearsed for a week before the shooting even began.

The lack of planning can be the biggest roadblock to completing any film, so I would say that all filmmakers should extensively plan their work before getting into action.



PHOTO: STAR

Looking back at Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin's enduring legacy

In conversation with Mainul Abedin



(L) The Shilpacharya in his studio. (M) This sketch by Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin was recently auctioned to raise funds for Covid-19 relief. (R) Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin (R) with a young Mainul Abedin.

RASHEEK TABASSUM MONDIRA

Zainul Abedin is considered to be the founding father of Bangladeshi modern art. He was honoured with the title, Shilpacharya, which translates to 'the master of art'. He made undeniable contributions to art creation and education in Bangladesh. On his 106th birth anniversary (December 29, 2020), the Faculty of Fine Art building in University of Dhaka, was named Shilpacharya Zainul Bhavan, in honour of him. On the occasion, his youngest son, Engineer Mainul Abedin, shared anecdotes and memories of his father with *The Daily Star*.

"My father was a very busy person, always immersed in his art and institutional responsibilities," shares Mainul Abedin. "He used to take us out on boat rides. He liked scenic beauty, and brought it to life on his canvas frequently. We would often wake up

to ten to twelve new artworks by him in the morning, after an outing. It was astonishing!"

Zainul Abedin was awarded the Rockefeller Foundation Travelling Fellowship in 1956 and visited several countries across the globe at the time. "I was only four years old then and I had the rare opportunity to visit my father in New York, along with my mother. I still remember bits and pieces of the journey," shares Mainul Abedin. "I visited several countries, including Belgium, France and Italy among others, with my father, very early on in my life."

Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin was the founding principal of the Government Institute of Arts and Crafts in 1948. We now know this institution as the Faculty of Fine Art, University of Dhaka — our very own Charukola. He also founded Bangladesh Arts & Crafts Foundation in Sonargaon,



Narayanganj. He fought to uphold and preserve the rights of the rural craftsmen and their works, throughout his life.

According to his son, one of the greatest regrets of the maestro's life was not being able to accomplish all his envisioned goals related to arts



Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin

and crafts. "He had plans to create a 'Folk Village' on the premises of Bangladesh's Folk Art Museum, where local artisans and craftsmen from across the country could work and carry out research," says Mainul Abedin, reflecting on his father's hopes.



Mainul Abedin



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MAINUL ABEDIN

"He envisioned a place where artisans could work on traditional creations with pottery, metal, silver and wood among many other mediums and forms of art. Though the museum was founded by his initiative in 1975, unfortunately, the 'Folk Village' concept never saw the light of day."

Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin immersed himself not only in artworks, but also in the art movement, education and preservation. More than sixty percent of the works in the Folk Art Museum were collected by the artist himself.

Mainul Abedin believes that there is a reflection of Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin in all works of art in present Bangladesh. "The artists of our country are very progressive and talented. I expect them to reflect our country's heritage and roots in all kinds of work," he says.

Mainul Abedin also reflects on the

lack of interest in the history and legacy of art among some students. "Several students come to study in Charukola, but many of them don't know about the contributions and works of the maestros in the field," he shares. "If they fail to know about the history of the art movement in Bangladesh, how can we expect the general public to know the true history?"

"People must know about the roots of their country and heritage," Kohinoor Abedin, daughter-in-law of Zainul Abedin, shares, joining the conversation. "It is the young generation's responsibility to uphold and protect the cultural aspects of our country, along with keeping up with the pace of the changing times."

"I salute Zainul Abedin, not just as my father, but also as the Shilpacharya. Now, I realise what a great man he was, in every aspect of life," concludes Mainul Abedin.