

Sohel Rana looks back on his illustrious career



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Sohel Rana came into the limelight with the film, "Masud Rana". He has made outstanding contributions to the industry, not only as a noted actor, but also as a director and producer. Sohel Rana will be receiving the lifetime achievement award at the National Film Awards. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, the actor looks back on his memorable career.

How do you feel about receiving the lifetime achievement award at the National Film Awards?

I am ecstatic, I can't find the words to describe my feelings. I will be 74 soon, and I feel that my acting career is nearing its end. The Almighty has been kind to me. I would like to thank the government and the jury board for honouring me with this recognition.

What do you consider to be the biggest achievement of your life?

The audience's love is my biggest achievement. Whenever I meet people from Bangladesh in different parts of the world, they are always respectful to me. I am lucky and grateful to have the love of so many people.

You were a producer of the acclaimed film, "Ora Egaro Jon". Can you share your experience with the film?

"Ora Egaro Jon" is based on true events. I used to write in *The Daily Ittefaq*, and after our independence, I learned about several true events of the war and I wrote about

them.

Freedom fighter Khasru and director Chashi Nazrul Islam were my close friends. When Chashi Nazrul Islam decided to make a film, I went to writer Masum Yahudi, and we worked on the story.

We decided that our first film should be based on the Liberation War. I was a student of Dhaka University, and I lost several of my close friends in the war. Their memories inspired me to make the film.

"Masud Rana", your debut film, was a notable project in your career. How was your experience of making that film?

I gained immense popularity with this film, and it had a positive impact on my life. Masud Rana, as a character, was beloved. We had doubts about how well the audience would respond to him, but thankfully, people loved him. I worked opposite Kabori in this film. It was an amazing experience.

How has the pandemic affected you?

At this point, we are all helpless against Mother Nature. I stay at home on most days. I haven't gone out much. I spend my time listening to music, praying, and sometimes, watching my own films. Songs such as "Banshi Oi Ager Moto Baje Na" are close to my heart. Sometimes, I get emotional when I watch my films. The memories often sadden me.

Translated by Rasheek Tabassum Mondira

Professor Abdus Selim on writing the English screenplay for 'The Grave'

SARAH ANJUM BARI

Having lost his family, the journey of a Muslim man digging a hundred graves to enter shapes the story of *The Grave*, the first Bangladeshi film to be made in English. For playwright, translator, and academic Abdus Selim, translating the original Bangla screenplay—titled *Gor*—by Gazi Rakayet was part of the vision of seeing Bangladeshi films find international recognition.

In a conversation with *The Daily Star*, Professor Selim discusses his experience of writing the English screenplay and all that goes into translating and writing for the stage.

How did you become involved with this project?

Gor was originally a play. It all started almost four years back—I was teaching at North South University at the time. Gazi Rakayet had directed the first play to be performed at North South University. One of my earlier translations had also been directed for the TV by Rakayet, so we knew each other quite well. So when he suggested that we make a film in English, I was initially reluctant but somehow he convinced me.

Last year or maybe the year before, he told me he's ready.

When it is spoken all over the world in many varieties, we, the foreign language speakers of English, develop our own structures, our own vocabulary and our own phrases and idioms influenced by our culture. The Spanish, the Scandinavians, the Africans, they each have their own pronunciations of English. Native English speakers should accept that there are many Englishes in the world today.

If Bangladesh has a specific variety of English, why should it not be projected to the world? This idea convinced me to work on *The Grave*.

Were you involved in any other capacity besides writing the screenplay?

Yes. I asked Gazi Rakayet to finish his work and show me the raw "rush". He had shot the scenes originally in English, but once he called me in, I explained to him that, ultimately, he would have to dub in some scenes. So we worked on the pronunciations, the intonations, giving the actors some training, etc.

Working on this film made me change my mind about some things. It made me think,

why can't we use our local pronunciations and intonations? India and many other non-English speaking countries are producing films and TV series which we watch on streaming platforms. So why not us?

Apart from the fact that this is the first English or bilingual film made in Bangladesh, what makes the story special?

The film reflects our culture and religion. The premise is based on a man who has lost everything, his loving family, his daughter, because of a tsunami, which is linked with life in this country. The loss makes him return to his ancestral land. And he thinks that the only way to get salvation is to dig one hundred graves, so he can go straight to heaven and meet his family. This really

though the sad reality is that they don't work commercially. Hopefully they can bring us critical acclaim.

As a linguist, what were some of the things that influenced your process of translating this script?

The main question was, what kind of English will we use to express our folk and rural culture? Simple expressions like *panta kheyey rouna dilam*, or the socioeconomic implications of the death of a village family's cow—how do you explain them to an international audience?

Secondly, when writing subtitles, I have to condense dialogues to fit the duration of a scene. But with *The Grave*, instead, I had to focus on making the dialogues communicable to the audience and speakable for the actors.

When you're writing a script for the stage or the camera, you're working with text, but the end result is meant to be visual. How do you navigate these differences?

The first play I ever translated was *Galileo*. When I watched the final performance after nine months of rehearsal, I realised that there is a big difference between what we read in the classroom and what we watch on the stage. A play has a double existence—it belongs to the writer and to the interpretation of the director. That convinced me to translate more plays.

There is of course a difference between writing for the camera and the stage, but I prefer the latter because it is more challenging. Even after months of rehearsing, whatever you do on the stage is the first and final product.

What other projects are you working on right now?

Five or six plays have been submitted to directors. Upon reading one of them, titled *Love Letters*, Aly Zakir had told me, "This is the play with which I will return to the stage." Ramendu Majumder and Ferdousi Majumder will act in it now. I translated another play for Neema Rahman, as well as another Broadway version of *The Plague*. They're all in the works, but given the pandemic I'm not sure when they will be staged.

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PHOTO: STAR

intrigued me—it can be wrong, but it touches upon a belief system. The last scene in which he digs his own grave—the hundredth grave—really impressed me.

The other thing is, as a member of the Bangladesh Oscar committee—every year we nominate films made in Bangladesh knowing that it won't amount to anything. Our filmmaking has not yet acquired the quality that can bring us an Oscar. However, upon making this film, we realised we can nominate it for the category of English films made in a non-native country.

I believe this English version of *Gor* can work as an example and an initiator for many filmmakers in Bangladesh, even



Tariq Anam Khan and Sabira Alam.



Sabira Nur in a powerful scene with Tariq Anam Khan.

Ashfaque Nipun's 'Koshtoneer' is a riveting commentary on family

SHARMIN JOYA

Celebrated director Ashfaque Nipun's "Koshtoneer" was released on Hoichoi yesterday (January 15).

The film is a production of Packup Films, featuring Tariq Anam Khan, Runa Khan, Syed Babu, Shamol Mawla, Sabira Nur and Yash Rohan among others. The story of this Hoichoi film revolves around a family, where the father is the head and is responsible for all kinds of decisions in the household.

"The plot is layered with modern political and social contexts in very subtle ways," shares the director. "Though it is about a family, it represents the image of the state at many levels."

Nipun also shared that working with Hoichoi, an international OTT platform, for the first time, was a pleasant experience.

The dubbing and post production work of the film, including colour grading and sound design, was done



Director Ashfaque Nipun explaining scenes to Sabira Nur.

in Kolkata. "We shot everything in six days. However, we got enough time for the post production work," says Nipun.

He also discussed the major differences between television and streaming platform projects. "I am glad to get the opportunity of crafting a plot without any barriers of thought that usually we have to take into account while working for television," he asserts.

He also shared that he could freely choose the actors, and had enough

budget to complete the production.

Tariq Anam Khan plays the head of the household in the film, who is somehow connected with corruption, but wants his family to be ideologically firm.

"I have seen such families in my life," says the actor. "The plot is quite relatable to the households of our country, where people struggle with their philosophical ideas and the clashes between the perspectives of individuals."

He mentioned that it is his first collaboration with Ashfaque Nipun. "I have watched his work before, he is a truly passionate director and a great storyteller," he says.

"As theater artists, we prefer getting the full script from before to understand the character and get involved in the story. Then, we learn our lines and improvise accordingly. Nipun handed us the script after we arrived on the set and we had instant rehearsals for the scenes of each day. I had sessions with him as well. He is very supportive."

He further adds, "Nipun is very clear about what he wants, so, it was not very hard to get the work done smoothly. It was a great experience working with the whole team. We became a family, and after the shoot, we missed each other, as we had such a great time together!"

Hoichoi Bangladesh's Business Lead Sakib R Khan talked about his expectations from "Koshtoneer". "Ashfaque Nipun is a brilliant director, and we have tried to bring out all of his strengths. This film has both political themes and drama," he says.

He further said that Hoichoi is confident about the director's work. "We didn't have the complete script for Koshtoneer, like other projects, as Ashfaque Nipun improvises on the set. We had full faith in him, and he has exceeded all of our expectations. We have plans to work with him on projects with bigger budgets in the future," adds Sakib.

"This will be the experience of a lifetime"

— Arifin Shuvoo on portraying Bangabandhu

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

National Award-winning actor Arifin Shuvoo entered the world of showbiz with television, making his way to the silver screen with hits like "Dhaka Attack" (2017) and "Shapludu" (2018), among many other memorable hits.

The actor is set to portray the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his biopic. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, the actor talks about his preparations for the role, his experience and his expectations.

How are you preparing yourself for portraying the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman?



PHOTO: COLLECTED

I was cast in this role in February 2019 and since then, I have prepared for this every day. I watched a lot of documentaries and films on our great leader, and viewed his archived video clips. Reading different research-based books and conversing with the writers of such pieces has also helped me understand him a lot.

We were supposed to start shooting, but it was halted due to the coronavirus pandemic. Nevertheless, the long break has given me more time to perfectly understand the character of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

How do you feel about this opportunity?

Being a Bangladeshi, it is a matter of great pride and honour from my side. As an artist, it is my responsibility to do justice to his legacy, and I will give it my all. Even though at times, there is a lot of anxiety and pressure, I am trying to keep calm. This will be the experience of a lifetime, and I want to enjoy it to the fullest. Shyam Benegal is a perfectionist, and I wish to deliver in accordance with his expectations. The performance I put up is all that matters now, and that's what I have been focusing on.

Tell us a bit about your recent conversation with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

This has been one of the most memorable incidents of my life. She gave me a lot of insight on her father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's character, things I would have only known from someone very close to his heart. This experience has left a mark in my heart for all eternity. She gave me her blessings to succeed in this challenging portrayal.

When do you plan to begin shooting for this project?

We will be travelling to Mumbai, India on January 19 and plan to start from January 25. This role will remain a milestone in my career.