

COVER STORY

LADIES & GENTLEMEN

'Ladies & Gentlemen' is a new web series available now on ZEE5. The talented minds behind the show include director Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, producer Nusrat Imrose Tisha, along with actors Iresh Zaker, Maria Nur, Partha Barua, and Tasnia Farin. In this discussion, the team talk with Rafi Hossain to share their experiences with the project.



NUSRAT IMROSE TISHA

As a director, Farooki always knows what each actor needs, and he draws a perfect picture of the world his characters will be a part of. This portrayal makes it much easier for the actors to transition into their characters. The amount of effort he puts in motivates us. Although, as a producer, he is indecisive. He often changes his mind about scripts. Even though the constant changes can be challenging to deal with at times, working with him is always very exciting. Farooki usually has three stages in his production process. First, he does the scripting, then the shooting, and finally the editing. In all these stages, he makes several alterations, but he always knows what he is doing. By the time the clips leave the editing table, it is as if an entirely different product is delivered. I had to tell our finance manager to extend our shooting time by three days because Farooki always needs it. The first time I worked with him was on a drama by Anisul Hoque. It originally took seven days to shoot it. Five days later, he called me and said he lost all the cassettes. This is why I know it is always better to keep a few extra days for shooting.



process. There is a particular scene in the series without any dialogue, and we shot it after our wrap-up party. After we all celebrated the end of shooting the series, we had to call Maria and Farin again to reshoot these scenes.

While we talk about the relevance of the television industry in Bangladesh, I think televisions will remain relevant for a long time. However, it has become less popular in Bangladesh because television channels no longer appeal to their demographic. Nowadays, these channels create content that is better suited for platforms like YouTube. Existing television audiences, however, do not find this as entertaining as what they previously had. OTT platforms also have a more diverse audience, so there are more opportunities for creators to work freely. They also provide us with more time to prepare for our work. For example, in our case, Farin, Tisha, and I worked together for an entire month, and it was very effective in building Farin's character. Television platforms are more restrictive in this regard. OTT platforms are already popular in other countries, and I think they are the future of entertainment for us as well.

I want to do more web-based films and series, and the reason behind this is even though I worked on several projects for the past few years, I could not show them to my audiences. Different filmmakers have different approaches to their work. Some of them wait a long time after finishing one project before taking up another one. For me, it is like regularly writing a diary that I want people to see. I missed being connected to my audiences so much that it has caused me a great deal of sadness over the years. It got worse because of the pandemic. The advantage of publishing your work on web-based platforms is that a large number of people from all over the world have access to the latest releases at any time. It is very convenient compared to more traditional methods of distribution that take up a lot more time and effort. OTT platforms create space for both high-budget blockbuster films and films made by independent directors such as myself. This is why we have seen such a sharp rise in their popularity. I look forward to working on more films and series for these platforms in the future.

MOSTOFA SARWAR FAROOKI

The shooting for this project was during the pandemic, but the situation was not as bad back then as it is now. We shot the film around February and March of this year. The main story consisted of my ideas, but we had a team for the story development. This team included me, Tisha, Tanvir Hossain as well as Syed. We developed the story for about six months, and I came up with several different stories and ideas before I settled on the final one. The series is a combination of different genres and not purely "thriller". It starts as a drama and then goes into the suspense-thriller territory. We did not shoot it as a pure thriller series as it also follows the structure of dramas. The formation that can be seen on screen is different from the way we shot it. During shooting, I had to change a lot of things and also improvise very frequently. I also made changes during the editing

IRESH ZAKER

Farooki bhai is very empathetic as a director. He considers that each actor has had different journeys. He prioritizes making our work comfortable. His devotion is also contagious and makes us want to work harder. Out of the three directors, I consider the best of all time, he is one of them. For the production of Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very grateful to both Tisha and Sanita because while Farooki bhai was managing his directorial work, they helped relieve a lot of pressure within our operation. Meem, the executive producer, was also a great contributor to our production process. There is a certain level of professionalism embedded within Farooki bhai as well. He handled both the creative aspects of the series skillfully while supporting us throughout production. He does not

stop working on his projects until they are finally released because he wants to perfect them. This includes things like dubbing, trailers, etc. When talking about the experience of working with ZEE5, I would say it was wonderful. We work with them relatively frequently. OTT platforms are still an emerging thing here in Bangladesh, and we are still experimenting with them. Along with a group of companies, we are committing ourselves to work with it because we believe they have a future in this country. We have incredible talent here, such as Farooki bhai, Farin, and Maria, and they are worthy of global recognition. We also have talented writers and cinematographers who can produce work people will undoubtedly pay to see. I am thankful to our partners at ZEE5 for believing in us and investing in our project. If we have this constant support, I think our film industry has a bright future. We are already doing well with our full-length films, so why not try out web series as well?



PARTHA BARUA

I had a positive experience working for Ladies and Gentlemen. I had a wonderful team to work with and enjoyed being part of it. The production also went smoothly. Farooki is also a fantastic director who built the characters up perfectly. He could convey what he wanted in the series perfectly, and it was very comfortable working with him.



TASNIA FARIN

Since this is my first web series, and I had to play an important character throughout the eight episodes, I did feel a little bit of pressure at first. However, knowing the talented people in my team were there to support me was very relieving. I connected with my character, and most of the time, it felt so natural that I did not even think I was acting. As a director, I believe Farooki bhai has a good understanding of people's minds. He knows how to communicate with people individually, as he realizes everyone is different. He prepares each of us for our characters while keeping this in mind, making it easier for us to embody our roles and understand them. When it comes to my achievement, then honestly, I think less about what will appeal to a greater number of audiences and more about how the work would make me feel. I also think about how I would perceive my work as an audience myself. I love to work, and I love playing characters. Because I work for myself first, it resonates with audiences because they can see the heart I put into my roles.



MARIA NUR

Farooki bhai tries to connect all his work to reality, and I think that ties back to the casting process as well. He chooses his actors based on whom he thinks would best suit the character as a real person. Like my team has said, he tries to make us feel comfortable during production. If we had opinions on how we felt certain scenes could be shot, he always considered those and explained his perspective. He was also incredibly motivational. He convinced me that I was the perfect person to play my character made me much more confident about myself. I think that is what makes him such a good director and producer. In simple words, I think he is just amazing, and it shows on the screen in his works. Whenever I watch the scenes after the editing is complete, I often do not recognize them because they change drastically. Even though we all have the script, I could never tell what is going to happen next in the story when I was watching the show for the first time on screen. It was all worth it because the silent scene Farooki bhai mentioned turned out to be very touching. I learned so much from that myself. People appreciated it as well, and they said it helped convey a lot more emotions.

