

Filmmaking for a global audience

PRIYANKA CHOWDHURY

Throughout the last two decades in Bangladesh, there has been a shift in storytelling on screen. Most notably, directors made films that not only initiated conversations in the country, but also made strides on global platforms. They participated in major international festivals, paving the path for aspiring filmmakers to practice their work fearlessly.

However, the concept of film festivals remains convoluted to the masses, and

young filmmakers to take risks.

Farooki's "Shonibar Bik" (Saturday Afternoon) was banned by the Bangladesh Film Censor Board. The film is loosely inspired from the Holey Artisan attack of 2016, but it is not a portrayal of the actual events.

The Bangladesh-Germany co-production won the Russian Film Critics Award at the Moscow International Film Festival, and also travelled to Munich, Sydney, and Busan.

Director Abdullah Mohammad Saad's "Rehana Maryam Noor" made history as



Sara Afreen



Rezwan Shahriar Sumit



Mahde Hasan



Aung Rakhine



Kamar Ahmad Simon

only a few names seem to repeat in the circuit. To explore the reach and impact of such international platforms, The Daily Star caught up with several noted artistes who took Bangladeshi films to different festivals.

Films such as "Matir Moyna" by Tareque Masud, "Shunte Ki Pao!" by Kamar Ahmad Simon, and "Made in Bangladesh" by Rubaiyat Hossain earned global recognition for the country.

Mostofa Sarwar Farooki is considered to be a pathbreaker in Bangladeshi cinema. His film, "Television", ushered in a new era for our movies. World premiered as the closing film at the 17th Busan International Film Festival, it received many accolades and inspired a bunch of

the first Bangladeshi film to be screened at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival's Un Certain Regard section, last year. Un Certain Regard presents 20 films with unusual styles and non-traditional stories seeking international recognition.

Meanwhile, International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) selected Simon's Anyadin... (Day after...) for its 2021 international competition. Three Bangladeshi films - Farooki's "No Land's Man", Mohammad Rabby Mridha's "Paayer Tolay Mati Nai" and Saad's "Rehana Maryam Noor" were selected for the 26th Busan International Film Festival.

Over the last decade, a number of Bangladeshi films took part in the

Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Sundance and Toronto International Film Festivals, which are considered to be the "big five" in the circuit. Among directors, Simon's presence in festivals has been noteworthy. However, it took a good deal of consideration.

"Festivals are a great way to launch a film, but choosing the right one for your film is a critical decision that you must take carefully. My film, 'Shunte Ki Pao! (Are You Listening!) was in consideration for Berlinale when I received a proposal from Dok-Leipzig, also from Germany,"

around the world and all of them, including the leading ones, are governed by their own agendas. A quick example is Iran. The brand of Iranian cinema was no less than a creation of festivals like Cannes and Berlinale as an extension of the critical western gaze on the 'Islamic Republic,' explained Simon.

"If we consider Iranian filmmakers of the post-Kiarostami generation, we'll find that the more they were critical of their own values and culture, the more they were attributed. Taxi by Jafar Panahi is one such film that comes to mind, but in my opinion, Metal and Melancholy by Heidi Honigman is a much better film shot in Peru almost on the same theme, but only a few may remember it. Less politically-oriented filmmakers can easily put Bangladesh in the same genre, especially when festivals are looking for the next Iran."

Moreover, young director Mahde Hasan's feature film, "Sand City", won the CNC development grant for its visual audacity and artistic originality at Open Doors Locarno 2018. "It is indispensable to know the characteristics of film festivals. Some offer just screening where makers can experiment with their concepts and some are markets where even well-known directors bring their films for selling and distribution," he added. "Getting officially selected for a competition or grant essentially shows people's trust in filmmakers. Grants and funds come through rigorous trials, it is crucial to engage local financiers and producers for the development of the project. Having a festival in mind from the pre-production time is not discouraged because it will work as a source of motivation, but filmmakers must have clear visions of their intentions."

From his experience of workshops, Hasan shared that most South Asian films do poorly in sound design, which should be taken into careful consideration.

A nation requires consistency to hold a

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A nation
requires
consistency to
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position in
the festival
circuit.

said Simon. "This is considered the 'new Berlin', and they pitched the idea for me to be the 'curtain-opener of the oldest doc fest'. So, I didn't wait for the decision of Berniale and launched the film in Leipzig. Producer Sara Afreen submitted a work-in-progress version of 'Day after...' to IDFA, and they chose the film for the main international competition."

He added that IDFA is considered to be one of the top leading festivals, along with Cannes, Berlinale, and Venice, but our local audience knows very little about it. "Still, we chose to launch the film at IDFA since it is a once in a lifetime opportunity. It is a very subjective scenario, where a filmmaker's philosophy rules the game. There are thousands of festivals running

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