



National film grants WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

Filmmakers talk pros and cons

SHARMIN JOYA

The government of Bangladesh has been up front about supporting the film industry, providing funds since the 1976-77 fiscal years. In the past 46 years, a total of 173 films have been granted funds in the categories like full length feature films, short film and documentaries.

Since then, grants have been regularly handed out with the exception of fiscal years—1977-81, 1983-84, 1997-98 to 1999-2000, 2001-02, and 2005-06.

Amidst the pandemic last year, a total of 19 films were selected in the 2021-22 fiscal year, ranging from BDT 60 to 75 lakhs. Out of these projects, six of them are short films; and two are based on the Liberation War.

The reaction to this particular grant was divisive, to put it mildly. Filmmakers from 33 organisations across the country protested, highlighting the inconsistencies in our national film grant process on July 4.

Filmmakers and producers like Nasir Uddin Yousuff, Anjan Zahidur Rahim, Manzare Hasin, N Rashed Chowdhury and Humaira Bilkis, among others joined the protest.

They had demanded that independent films be prioritised, while commercial movies be moved into a separate category.

felt that the fraternity needs support to recover.” The “Aynabaji” famed director emphasized that he was assured that the support to commercial films were a prophylactic measure to keep the industry alive.

“How do we even classify commercial and non-commercial films?” Amitabh was one of the jury members of short film committee, for the last two terms.

He also shed light on the entire process which begins after the grant has been approved. “There is no one to supervise, where this money is going,

explain their reasons for missing their deadlines.”

Rakayet wrote the script of “Mrittika Maya” in 2000, and until he received the government grant in 2012, he could not release the film. “This is why government grants are important,” shares the director, who went on to win 17 National Film Awards for his work.

After “Debi”, actress and producer Jaya Ahsan received a grant for her upcoming production “Roid”. “Debi” was a commercial aided by the government. “Mainstream films need financial support to regain its lost charm, and the government has taken this initiative of supporting the them, I appreciate it,” shares the actress. “Then again, commercial films tend to get more producers and sponsors compared to documentaries, or archival films. Such films need extended support, because these works of art are also essential to keep us rooted towards our history and culture.”

She shared that during “Debi”, many in the industry tried to imply that government funded films can never be commercially successful. “It was probably the first government aided film that received this level of commercial success. Success often depends on how much effort the distributors and producers exert behind it.”

Filmmaker and critic Manzare Hassin raised questions about the transparency of the grant committee and explained the discrimination faced by documentary films, “I have been involved in the grant procurement procedure before, so I know what happens,” he shared. “For instance, I applied for a full-length documentary movie this time, and while documentaries are eligible, I know what takes place behind the scenes.”

According to him, none of the documentary proposals are even presented to the electorate committee that decides which movies will receive grants.

“There are seven others like me, who spent 2-3 months of effort and money to apply for the grant. However, our proposals don’t even make it before the electorate committee.”

He also said that if this is how it will be, then it should at least be announced from the beginning that documentaries are not eligible for grants.

Shakib Khan received a government grant for the first time for his production “Maya”. “Government grants are indeed a great support for making big-budgeted films, and I am glad that ‘Maya’, despite having a commercial script, was considered for the fund,” he said. “I feel that those who are regularly making films should be provided support. It can help the industry produce quality commercial films. In order to revive the industry, we should make more films that are entertaining.”

The government’s support for films has transcended towards non-grant initiatives as well, as filmmakers gain courage to release projects on a regular basis. “Hawa”, “Poran” and the more recent “Operation Sundarban” and “Beauty Circus” are all testaments to a revamped image that the grants helped project, even if in a small way.

Policies should support art, not hinder it



NASIR UDDIN YOUSUFF

I can see there is a misconception that we are protesting against providing grants to the mainstream films. That is simply not true.

Our demand was very clear and concise — we want full length documentaries to get more priority. The history of film began with documentaries, and fictions came later. In order to preserve film as a medium of art, we must produce more documentaries, and these films hardly get any patronisation, thus the government should extend their hands to save these works from the brink of extinction.

The grants are supposed to support those films that reflect more of our own culture, art, Liberation War, struggles, morality and achievements. It is extremely essential to document a generation exactly as they are, so that it can be

All kinds of films are needed for an industry to grow. I am not objecting for providing grants to commercial films. However, the policy does not include any such law where commercial films will be funded.

In 2010, we brought an amendment, where the state could claim funded films as an owner. Kamal Chowdhury and I were members of the committee, where we debated against this law. Our point was grants are sort of gifts, which they cannot ask to return. Also, a film is the director’s brainchild, how can the state demand ownership of an intellectual property!

Fully commercial films should be provided with soft loans, with very low interest. Those who cannot earn revenues from films, yet these projects are tasteful should be prioritised.

I believe that the newly drafted policy will make thing easier than before. Policies should be made to support art, not to hinder them. With time, everything needs upgrade, and it is high time, that we upgrade our policies as well. We should address the frustrations of the newer generation.

I remember when Tokon Thakoor was arrested, we protested the act, because arresting someone can never be the solution. However, we should not misuse the facilities we get. Artists should be the most responsible amongst all other citizens in the country.

When I directed “Guerilla”, I received a grant of BDT 19 lakhs. However, the production took me BDT 4 crore and 17 lakhs. I had to repay the loan by selling my wife’s (Shimul Yousuff’s) flat.

The author is an Ekushey Padak and National Film Award winning director.
Narrated to Sharmin Joya

“Mainstream films need financial support to regain its lost charm, and the government has taken this initiative of supporting the them, I appreciate it.”

JAYA AHSAN



“Art should not be trapped under any propaganda.”

NURUL ALAM
ATIQUE

Earlier, in the 2018-19 fiscal year, a writ was filed, where the High Court issued a rule seeking why the list of government grants made for the financial year 2018-19 should not be declared invalid. At the same time, according to the policy, the court also inquired why the order should not be given to make a new list of those grants.

Renowned filmmaker Amitabh Reza Chowdhury made his position in this regard. “We have already proposed a new draft of regulations, which will definitely stress more on full-length documentaries and Liberation War-based films,” shared the director, who received the highest amount (BDT 75 lakhs) of grant this year for his film “1969”.

“As for commercial films, I was told by the Information Minister, Dr Hasan Mahmud, MP, due to the pandemic, the film industry has been suffering from a great loss, and the government

or what are they being spent on?”

He added that he will be voluntarily supervising 3 short films which received grants this fiscal year. “I will be their mentor, and they have to keep me updated about their project until they submit it. This is how the system should be.”

He also raised questions about the films which could not see the light ever, even after taking the allocated money.

“Dubshatar” famed director Nurul Alam Atique told The Daily Star that sometimes, directors struggle to find sponsors for a film, since the amount of grants given in the early years were not sufficient to complete a production.”

“I felt pressurised when I received the grant of BDT 35 lakhs in the economic year 2014-15, for my film ‘Laal Moroger Jhuti’,” he said. “Since I realised that I cannot complete the film within this budget, and I was unable to find any producer — I was always insecure about getting into trouble with the committee.” The director finally completed the film last year, and earned accolades for his work.

Atique further shares that the amount given currently is adequate to complete an entire project, and he is interested to apply in the next year. “Art should not be trapped under any propaganda.”

Gazi Rakayet, an acclaimed filmmaker and eminent cultural personality, served as one of the jury members in this year’s grant selection board. “The films which received grants this year are all based on their merit,” shares the ‘Gor’ director. “Grants are given to films to support art. However, a lot of people have misused this sanction. Some of them did not even care to

The curious case of missing grants

[2009-10]

A grant worth BDT 19 lakhs and 20 thousand were provided to six films, out of which Akhtaruzzaman’s “Suchona Rekhar Dike” remained incomplete.

[2010-11]

BDT 24 lakhs was granted for six films each. Mirza Sakawat Hossain’s “Dhoka” and Faruk Hossain’s “Kaktarua” were never released.

[2011-12]

Six films obtained BDT 35 Lakhs this year. Maruf Hasan Arman was granted a fund for “Nekre Aronnyo”, however, even after taking the first installment, he never responded to any calls from the ministry. Since he missed the deadline, a case

was filed against him. It was also alleged that he bought land with the amount he received from grant.

[2012-13]

Seven full-length films received BDT 35 Lakhs, and 5 short films received BDT 10 Lakhs each. Tareque Masud’s “Kagojer Phul” was one of them. Sadly after receiving the grant, he was killed in a car crash. Later, the producer and Tareque’s wife Catherine Masud appealed to return the amount, which the ministry did not approve and requested her instead to make the film.

Tokon Thakoor went behind the bars in 2020 for not being able to submit “Kata”. The film, as of yet, did not happen. The Information Ministry also filed

case against Nargis Akter for “Joiboti Konnyar Mon”, for not being able to submit it.

Jaar Nessar Osman’s children’s film “Ponchoshongi” and Danny Sidaks’ “Kashar Thalay Rupali Chad” are not released as of yet.

[2014-15]

None of the directors of the short films were able to submit their projects on time.

[2015-16]

Seven full length feature and five short films were granted aid. Sara Afreen’s “Shongkhodhoni” (later titled Shikolbaha) awaits release after getting clearance from the censor board, Laura Talukder’s “Briddhasrom” and Pantho Prasad’s “Sabitri”. Also, Kauser Chowdhury’s

documentary “Boddyhobumite Ekdin”, none of them has any update about their release.

[2016-17]

Six films, out of which one is Children’s film “Priyo Jonmobhumi”, by Shohanur Rahman Sohan, one documentary and four full-fledged—Shabnam Ferdousi directorial project “Ajob Shundor”, “Day Mukti” by Kamal Sarker, and Ferdous Alam Siddiqi’s documentary film “Ekjon Mariam” none of them were released.

[2017-18]

Children’s film Manik Manobik’s “Ajob Chhele”, documentary “Obolombon” by Abid Hossain Khan, still await release.

[2018-19]

“Nosu Dakat Kupokat” to be helmed by Abu Raihan Jewel, documentary film “Bilkis Ebong Bilkis” by Humaira Bilkis and Purobi Matin’s “Khelaghor”. These works did not see the light, yet.

After Kabori Sarwar’s demise, her unfinished project, “Ei Tumi Shei Tumi”, remained incomplete. However, her son told to the media that he will complete the film for his mother.

Akram Khan’s “Bidhobader Kotha” has no update.

Hossain Mobarak Rumi’s “Onteshtokria” is also waiting for release. First lot of the shooting was done.

Hridi Huq’s “1971 Shei Shob Din” and Shomi Kaiser’s production “Shopno Mrittu Bhalobasha” also awaits release.