

# Documentary films are more important than you may think

**RAIAN ABEDIN**

Recently, I managed to watch a screening of *Beyond The Wave*, the story of Nasima Akter – the first Bangladeshi woman surfer. I had very little idea what the movie would even be about, and even though I could tell upon watching it that the film was produced under a strained budget, I remained transfixed by the facts that were laid right in front of me. So much so that later that very night, I spent hours on the internet, trying to learn more about this rather unconventional genre of film and the many ways it has impacted this country, even though for most of its lifespan it has existed in the shadows.

Documentaries have always held the monumentally important, yet frequently overlooked, task of telling stories that already exist. Instead of opting for creating fiction, they prefer the bizarreness of reality. Every year we see more and more filmmakers of all calibres try to make their own documentary films, showcasing truths of the world around them, distilling them down to form a rich story that does not compromise on facts. A lot of this is done with very little funding from producers, and despite it all, documentaries have had a significant global impact as another genre of film. They deserve not



DESIGN: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

just recognition, but to be celebrated for all they have achieved.

From 1971's *Stop Genocide* (Zahir Raihan) to 1989's *Adam Surot* (Tarek Masud) to 2007's *Swapnabhumi* (Tanvir Mokammel) to 2012's *Are You Listening!* (Kamar Ahmed Simon), documentary films in Bangladesh have told vivid stories about communities and events often undermined by most other media. The stories they tell are snapshots of history that pass us by, the incredible events that we often

fail to notice simply because the cultures we live in end up ignoring them. Make no mistake, documentary films may be an unconventional genre, but they deserve to be acknowledged as an art form for telling powerful stories about humankind, no matter their creed or class.

Although these films have made waves in international communities, even winning awards in many cases, they are still heavily underfunded and overlooked as a genre in our country. The reasoning

behind this is simple, since fiction stories can be made to be more entertaining, they have more value as a business. Hence, the Bangladesh Film Development Corporation and television broadcasting channels see no reason to provide funding for documentaries.

Most documentaries that are worth any note are usually completely independent productions or are somehow funded by international welfare organizations. And yes, this does mean that the world of documentary film is also marred with a number of films produced solely for propaganda, but lovers of the craft have again and again taken it upon themselves to use this medium to tell stories they simply cannot tell in fiction.

Of course, even beyond the few names I have mentioned, there are countless more to discover, I myself am still finding out about new documentaries pertaining to stories I didn't even know existed. Even without the help of major funding from any corporation, it is astounding to me how much they have been able to accomplish.

*Raian is currently upset at the dust that settles on his computer keyboard. Send him cleaning tips and tricks at IG: @raian\_is\_burning*

# What it means to be cultured

**RUDAIBA MAHBUB**

Let us assume, Hasan, a man in his early fifties, found himself pondering over what his daughter, Pori, could have meant when she used the word "slay" in response to him finally getting his car washed. His daughter had meant no harm. He resorted to the urban dictionary and caught up with the word "slay".

Later that day when his daughter let him know that she finished reading the book he had given him, Hasan replied with not only a "slay" but a "slay girl". His daughter, stunned, replied, "Wow, Baba you have become cultured!"

So, Hasan became "cultured".

Earlier, his daughter had become cultured too. In Hasan's mind, Pori had become cultured when she took upon reading his favourite author, Fyodor Dostoevsky.

They are now both considered cultured by each other, but for very different reasons. While one has mastered the art of using the Gen Z lingo, the other has started their journey into the literary classics. What this actually shows is that being considered cultured is a very subjective matter, depending on the person you are being labelled by.

Pori identifies as an ideal member of the contemporary society and in the contemporary context where culture might be depicted through hints about pop culture or current events. Thus, for Gen Z, culture often consists of the subtle references to pop culture or all that is trending, the things that are widespread on the internet, the memes, and the popular vernacular.

Hasan's views, on the other hand, hint at his preferences in the arts or literature, and he labels people depending on how much they have read or know about literature and the outside world.

While being cultured probably started out as having enough education or knowledge on a subject, these days it has evolved into a much broader idea, mostly referring to individual preferences. We might give definition to it based on our identities, beliefs, hobbies, and social notions we lean towards.

Gamers sometimes consider themselves cultured when compared to people who don't game, gamers might even address others as a "normie". However, even among gamers there are criteria you need to fulfil in order to be considered cultured. It might depend on the genre of the game you are playing or if you are up-

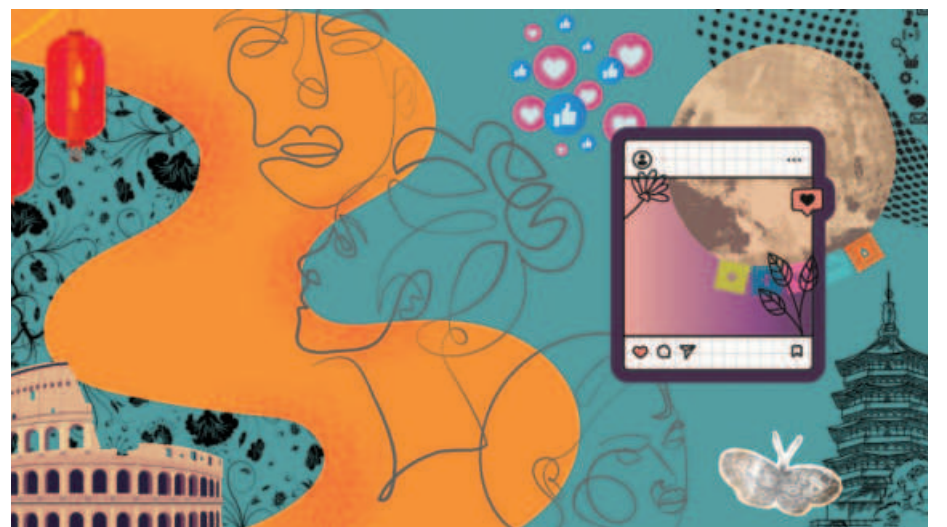


ILLUSTRATION: **SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM**

to-date with the world of gaming.

In music, a metalhead might consider someone who knows the classic metal bands or singers to be cultured. That definition would again not sit right with someone who is into indie music.

Furthermore, we can see in our Bangladeshi context, identifying with the roots and culture of the land, embracing its various cultural sentiments can be con-

sidered being cultured. To some it might mean savouring the traditional *daal bhaat* and *aloo bharta*. For others it may be subscribing to the traditions and festivities.

Ultimately, what we must keep in mind is that the concept of being "cultured" has no objective truth to it, and is completely subjective. Thus, one's own identity and perception is what defines what they view as being cultured.