How Zaineen became 'THE DIFFICULT BRIDE'

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When Rubaiyat Hossain's ***The Difficult Bride*** made history as the first feature-length film from Bangladesh to compete at the Venice International Film Festival, it wasn't just the film that had everyone talking. Curiosity quickly turned to its leading lady, Zaineen Chowdhury Karim, who, interestingly, shares her first name with the character she plays. One question lingered above all else: what made Rubaiyat believe that Zaineen was her "Difficult Bride"?

Many actresses auditioned for the role, but it was Zaineen who ultimately won Rubaiyat's confidence. As filming progressed, she proved exactly why she had been chosen.

Over a warm cup of coffee, Zaineen recounted the unexpected journey that took her from working behind the camera as an assistant director (AD) to becoming the protagonist.



PHOTO: **SCREENGRAB FEATURING ZAINEEN FROM 'THE DIFFICULT BRIDE'**

Their paths first crossed through Smith College in Massachusetts, where both had studied years apart. A former professor introduced them over email, initially with the idea of collaborating on an academic paper exploring the male gaze in Bangladeshi cinema. But when Zaineen visited Rubaiyat's home, the conversation soon shifted.

"She mentioned she was preparing her fourth feature film, and the idea came up that I could work as an assistant director on the project. The opportunity to be on a real film set and watch everything unfold was impossible to pass up."

What began as an assistant director's role gradually evolved into something much more. A writer by profession, Zaineen found herself reading drafts of the screenplay and sharing feedback as Rubaiyat developed the script.

"It was a project very close to her heart. She would send me drafts, I'd give her notes, and for a long time, we were shaping the script together. In many ways, we were building this character together."

But fate had other plans. While driving to pick up her cousin from the airport, Zaineen kept receiving calls from the team asking her to join a virtual script reading for the art, costume, and production departments.

"I was sitting in a moving car, reading the script from my phone. I'd lived with it for so long that I couldn't help but perform it with a little emotion."

A few months later, Rubaiyat asked a question that caught her completely off guard.

"She said, 'Would you consider auditioning for the part?' I remember thinking, 'Me?' It hadn't even crossed my mind."

Although she had acted in school and university theatre, starring in a feature film was never part of Zaineen's plans. Still, she decided to audition, believing she had nothing to lose.

For Zaineen, the casting also challenged conventional ideas of what a leading lady should look like. She admits she never imagined herself pursuing acting because she didn't fit the industry's traditional mold.

"I'm not tall, fair, or really skinny. I'm just a regular person," she said. "My character is struggling with her weight and trying to achieve perfection. People are already calling me fat, and I know there will be hate comments. I'm trying to prepare myself for that."

Ironically, those insecurities made her an even more natural fit for a character grappling with impossible beauty standards.

If landing the role was unexpected, sharing the screen with three National Film Award-winning actors was another challenge altogether.

Zaineen admitted she was initially intimidated, especially by Azmeri Haque Badhan, whom she considered an incredible actress. She described Reekita Nondine Shimu as "an absolute powerhouse" and said she often turned to her for guidance during scenes, while also praising Sunerah Binte Kamal for her talents.

Set inside Mayfair, a historic beauty salon in Dhaka, ***The Difficult Bride*** follows a bride-to-be preparing for her wedding. As the celebrations draw closer, she is pulled into an increasingly unsettling world where beauty, faith, memory, and fear collide.

To prepare for the role, Zaineen spent a day at a beauty salon, experiencing a full bridal package herself.

"I wanted to understand what brides actually go through. There were body scrubs, massages, eyebrow threading—so many procedures. Then, during filming, they even did traditional bridal makeup on me, using a foundation that was several shades lighter—which, in our society, is actually considered 'normal.'"

She believes those rituals become even more intense once marriage enters the picture.

"The pressure to lose weight, become fairer, and look perfect increases so much when you're about to get married. We wanted to explore that pressure and question why marriage is often treated as a woman's greatest achievement."

Those conversations weren't confined to the script. Throughout pre-production, she and Rubaiyat often discussed how women continue to be judged by their marital status, regardless of their accomplishments.

"Rubaiyat *apu* would joke that she could win an Oscar and people would still be happier if she got married. That's the reality. No matter what a woman achieves, someone will ask why she's still unmarried."

For Zaineen, those conversations made the film deeply personal. Rather than glamorising beauty, ***The Difficult Bride*** examines the pressure women face to meet impossible standards.

As the film gears up for its world premiere at the Venice International Film Festival, Zaineen is excited to introduce audiences to a different side of Bangladesh.

"It's my first film, and I think it's a very special story," she said. "International audiences often expect stories about poverty and suffering from Bangladesh. This film explores luxury and modernity while also revealing the violence that can exist beneath that opulence. I am really happy that I got to be part of this wonderful project."



PHOTO: **SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED**

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
TÁR



Apple TV+
Ted Lasso



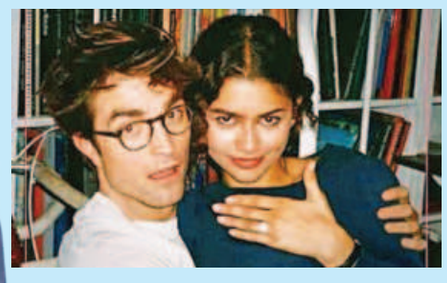
Prime Video
Sterling Point



Chorki:
Rockstar



HBO Max
The Drama



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



'Beyond the Brief'
July 18–August 8, 2026 | 4:00pm – 8:00pm
Bengal Shilpalay, Dhanmondi, Dhaka



'Chowkath'
July 31–August 8, 2026 | 3:00pm – 9:00pm
Opening: July 31, 2026 | 6:00 pm
Alliance Française de Dhaka, Dhanmondi



'Dhaka POP & Cosplay Fest 2026'
Friday, 7 August 2026 | 11am-9pm
Tokyo Square Convention Center, Mohammadpur

TV TALKIES

'Con City'

Con City is a crime comedy starring Arjun Das and Anna Ben. The film follows a group of con artists whose carefully planned scam spirals into a series of unexpected twists, forcing them to outsmart rivals and survive dangerous situations. Blending humour with suspense, the story balances clever cons, fast-paced action, and emotional moments. The performances, particularly by Arjun Das, have been widely praised, while the engaging screenplay has helped the film gain popularity with audiences after its digital release. The film is now streaming on Netflix



WHAT'S PLAYING

'Boba Tunnel' by ANUPAM ROY



Released in 2014 for Srijit Mukherji's ***Chotushkone***, ***Boba Tunnel*** remains one of Anupam Roy's most enduring songs. Written, composed and sung by Roy, the track centres on love that arrives too late, words left unsaid and the sense of distance that can remain even between two people who once felt close.

Its appeal lies in the way he keeps the arrangement simple and lets the writing do most of the work. There is no dramatic flourish; the song builds through small images, missed chances and the recurring question of whom one turns to when a relationship has already slipped away.

More than a decade after its release, ***Boba Tunnel*** has crossed 15.7 million streams on Spotify and remains among Roy's most-played songs on the platform. Its continued popularity shows how effectively a film song can outgrow its original setting and become part of the emotional vocabulary of its listeners.