

## Festival Review

### 17th Dhaka International Film Festival

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‘Better Cinema, Better Audience, Better Society’ The basic theme of Dhaka International Film Festival speaks volumes about the very purpose of film festivals in general and in a region where cinema was considered only as medium of entertainment for a long time, in particular. The growing awareness of the understanding of cinema as an artistic and powerful expression of social reality of the region and the people on the part of the film makers could be witnessed in the films that were screened in the Bangladesh Panorama of Dhaka International Film Festival 2019, though lacking in technical expertise.

The festival was inaugurated on 10<sup>th</sup> and marked with traditional songs and dances of Bangladesh showcasing the traditional tribal culture of the country for the audience comprising of a number of foreign film makers, film artistes, film critics and writers. *The Guest*, a film from Turkey and Jordan directed by Andac Haznedaroghu was screened as the inaugural film.

The festival caught its real momentum with the two-days conference on Women in Cinema in collaboration with Alliance France, that could be marked as the special feature of DIFF. DIFF has been conducting women’s conference for the last 4 years and the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the conference focused on the new generation of women directors and their place in the world cinema in the age of intensified manifestations of gender equality, and protest against structural male violence; women’s experience of watching cinema in urban Bangladesh; a critical feminist approach covering the subjects of sexuality, violence and Indian cinema.; cinematic gaze and gender masquerading; emergence of women film makers and the role/importance of film institutions in the changing scenario and American women’s role in alleviating gender discrimination in cinema. The young women directors from Bangladesh who have recently graduated from Film Institutions and have started their career with one or two short films to their credit, emphatically stated that while directing a film they have never thought in the terms of being a woman director as such. When they direct, they are just the directors. This was a new, encouraging approach marking the advent of new era.

But as for the films screened in the Bangladesh Panorama section there was not a single film directed by a woman director from Bangladesh.

The venue chosen for the film festival is one of the several deciding factors as far as the response of the audience is concerned. The venue for DIFF i. e. the National Museum and the Public Library, is situated in the heart of the bustling city surrounded by retail and whole sale market areas and nerve-wrecking traffic jams. The venue was bound to be shunned by the cinema culture conscious section of the local people that forms the audience of the festival. The local people who throng the area for shopping as well as to earn their living, the employees working in the nearby offices have hardly any idea of the ongoing event that is taking place right in the heart of the area. The ray of hope is seen in the form of the college students who visit the museum and the public library. They are likely to be curious and would take interest in such events. DIFF witnessed this keen interest on the part of the students and perhaps aspiring young film makers of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh as the developing third world country that had to undergo quite a lot of political, social turmoil, was represented by the 10 films screened in the Bangladesh Panorama. The poverty, the disparity, the exploitation of the poor and their struggle to survive and to have a better life provides the subject matter for *Namta*, *Pathshala*, *Sanatan Galpo*. At the same time the memories of liberation war and its impact on the relationships can be seen as the undercurrent of some of the films such as *Hridoyer Rongdhonu* (Life in Rainbow). The agony of the migration of the now rendered stateless Rohingya community is dealt with in a docudrama style in *Jonmo Bhume* ( Birth Place) while *Bhabnagar* and *Rajadhiraj Razzaak* are flat documentaries devoid of any dramatic expression and are just compilations of interviews. The `developing` nature of the cinema of Bangladesh is evident in the lack of technical smoothness, especially on the script, editing and acting level. While the local response for the festival looked lukewarm for the film *Debi*. The supernatural beliefs negating the psychological explanations attracted quite a good number of local delegates, which underlines the very nature of the populist approach of the local audience.

*Satatan Galpo* (Bangladesh, 2018) directed by Masum Aziz, though, stands out undoubtedly with its gripping pace, its poignant story telling and realistic approach with dramatic impact as also its well defined characters, mature acting and directorial precision. The location – the poverty stricken village of the fishermen on the banks of a river, where the money lender takes advantage of the plight of these poor people and drives them into an eternal trap of slavery, - eloquently unfolds the hard life of the people. The depiction of local beliefs and rituals further emphasize the agony. I would specially like to mention the precision with which the director handles the depiction of these rituals without falling prey to the temptation to linger on the ethnic rituals thereby deviating from the focus. Each and every elements of the narration blends perfectly leading to the ultimate agony, the hopelessness and the stark reality of the soil. The unassuming cinematography intensifies the agony of the region further. The film was unanimously chosen as the winner of FIPRESCI AWARD.

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