

## **THE 11TH DHAKA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**

By Peter Malone

The Dhaka International Film Festival emerged from the activities of the Rainbow Film Society which began its activities in 1977. The first festival was held in 1992. The festival takes place every two years and has the motto: Better Film. Better Audience. Better Society. The eleventh edition of the festival was held in Dhaka between January 14<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010.

### **OVERVIEW**

While the festival could be judged a success, it is important to note that every film festival around the world is struggling in recent years with budget problems and logistical issues as well as the practical demands of programming the best possible films and choosing guests to invite. Dhaka has had its own share of difficulties. This was true for the festival in January 2008. The developing political situation in Bangladesh and growing support for the festival meant that 2010 saw a better festival. Organisation was able to manage more smoothly.

The film selection had a higher standard than the previous festival. While there is always a challenge to publicise the event and draw audiences, apart from the days of cold snaps when many residents of Dhaka stayed indoors, there was a continual stream of people coming to see the films. The international visitors agreed that their experience at the festival was well worthwhile.

The festival also offers an opportunity to showcase local films as well as those from the wide range of countries comprising Australasia. Film students attended many screenings and had several days of workshops with local as well as overseas film-makers.

The venues, as previously, for the screenings were two halls in the National Museum and the hall in the Public Library. The technology was DVD and DVCAM projected on to large screens. A special logo was played before each program with an acknowledgement of the sponsors.

Mr Ahmed Muztaba Zamal and his committee ensured the day-by-day progress of the festival. The group of volunteers who were generous in their doing their ordinary tasks as well as hosting the visitors was a significant feature of the festival.

### **CEREMONIAL**

The opening ceremony of the festival on January 14<sup>th</sup> was more formal than before. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was present as chief guest in the inaugural ceremony of the nine-day 11th Dhaka International Film Festival 2010 at the National Museum in the city. The prime minister requested filmmakers, cultural activists and people of all walks of life to remain alert so that in no way unwelcome elements intrude into the Bengali culture. Hasina said her government would provide all-out support in further developing the quality of films in Bangladesh.

Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad, Festival Committee Chairman Syed Marghub Morshed, International Jury Board Chairman Saeed Akhtar Mirza of India, festival committee Vice-Chairman Badal Rahman, President of the Rainbow Film Society Kishwar Kamal and also festival director Ahmed Muztaba Zamal spoke on this occasion. GMG Airlines Chairman Abdus

Sattar Nini and First Secretary of Dutch Embassy in Dhaka Anja Roelofs also spoke at the function on behalf of the sponsors of the festival.

The closing ceremony and the presentation of awards were also more formal than previously. Again, there were speeches, especially Dr. Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury , Secretary, Ministry of Information , People's Republic of Bangladesh who spoke warmly of the festival and film culture. He and other representatives of the festival sponsors, including the Embassy of the Netherlands, GMG Airlines, Dhaka Club Limited presented the statue trophies to the winners.

The opening film was **Talentine**, directed by Yasmin Ahmad from Malaysia who died suddenly in 2009, aged 51. The closing film was from Bangladesh , **Gahiney Shobdo** ( *Dark Resonance* )

## **THE PROGRAM**

The program for 2010 was quite extensive.

Cinema of the World: (Open for all feature film categories). One film to be selected for an Audience Award by the general viewers. directed by Khalid Mahmood Mithu.

Children's Film Festival : Several films included. These screenings are considered ideal family outings and open to all children and adults. One film to be selected by audience vote for the Best Juvenile Film Audience Award.

**Focus** : A special selection of documentary and fictional films screened in the year's Country Focus portion of the festival. Both feature length and short films were shown.

**Bangladesh Panorama**: Five to seven films spanning the period from 1956 to 2009 were selected for the Bangladesh Panorama. This portion of the festival is a perennial audience favourite and provides an excellent opportunity to see older popular films on the big screen.

Independent Films: For the second time in its history, the festival screened films by independent film-makers experimenting with a variety of filming formats. The widely available, relatively low-cost formats of Betacam, VCD, DVD and mini DVs have allowed many more artists to venture into film production. This portion of the Festival showcased feature films as well as documentary and short films from around the world.

**Women Film-makers**: A selection of full-length feature films as well as short length and documentary films by female film-makers.. An independent jury of female film-makers, cultural experts, artists, and professionals judged this portion of the competition.

Spiritual Films Section : This section has been introduced to promote public discourse on the place of faith and spirituality in the human context. The idea is for viewers to distinguish between elements of identity in spirituality as opposed to the abuse of faith in fundamentalism. The showcasing of films on spirituality promotes greater cross-cultural understanding and tolerance and facilitate dialogue within communities as between communities. This section was organized with the co-operation of Religion Today Film Festival, Trento , Italy .

There were nineteen films chosen for the main competition. These included two from Bangladesh, **Third Person Singular Number** and **Gahiney Shobdo** (*Dark Resonance*) which was the closing film. Significant numbers of the films were from India and Iran but also included countries like Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Georgia/Kazakhstan, Croatia and Australia.

Films from Bangladesh and other Asian countries were screened during the special non-competitive section, World Cinema.

However, there were several sections which had their own juries: Children's films, Short Films and the Spirituality section with an inter-faith jury, which was supported by SIGNIS (The World Catholic Association for Communication) and the Religion Today Festival (from Trento, Italy) and a Women's Film-makers section.

As with many festivals around the world, there was a FIPRESCI Jury, a jury from the association of International Film Critics.

There was a retrospective selection of the films of Saeed Akhtar Mirza (president of the main jury) and of the celebrated Iranian director, Rasoul Sadrameli.

## **JURIES**

The membership of the juries reflected the international nature of the festival as well as the contribution from jurors from Bangladesh.

The **International Jury** for the main competition, for Australasian films comprised: the Indian film director, Saeed Akhtar Mirza as president of the jury, Mr Badal Rahman of Bangladesh, Chinese film-maker Bibo Liang, film-maker Mr Mostafa Kamal (UK/Bangladesh) and film-maker, Mr Enamul Karim Nirjhar from Bangladesh.

The FIPRESCI Jury comprised **FIPRESCI Jury** for the main competition, for Australasian films comprised Mr. Aijaz Gul, critic from Pakistan as Chair of the jury, Mr. Manoj Barpujari, critic from India and Mr. Mofidul Hoque from Bangladesh.

The **Interfaith Jury** for Spirituality Cinema comprised Mr Peter Malone, former president of SIGNIS, from Australia, as president of the jury, Professor Imtiaz Ahmed of Bangladesh, Ms Katia Malatesta, Director of the Religion Today Festival, Italy, painter Mr Subir Chowdhury of Bangladesh and actor and director Mr Taukir Ahmed of Bangladesh.

The **Women's Film-maker section Jury** comprised programmer Ms Latikah Padgaonkar of India as president of the jury, Ms Shamim Akhter, film-maker from Bangladesh and Ms Djeneba Diaby, programmer from Adu Dabi.

The **Jury for Short and Independent Section** Films consisted of Mr M. Mijarul Quayes, film critic from Bangladesh as Chair of the jury and film-makers Ms Samia Zaman both are from Bangladesh.

## **AWARDS**

### **1. Australasian competition**

#### **Best Film Award**

##### **'The Other Bank'**

Director: George Ovashili

Georgia/Kazakhstan, 93 mins, 2009.

#### **Best Director Award**

Mr. Mostafa Sarwar Farooki

Film: **Third Person Singular Number**

Bangladesh, 123 mins, 2009.

#### **Best Cinematographer Award**

Mr. Alireza Zarrin – Dast

Film: **Super Star**

Director: Ms. Tahmineh Milani

Iran, 106, 2009.

#### **Best Actress Award**

Ms. Fataneh Malek - Mohammadi

Film: **Super Star**

Director: Ms. Tahmineh Milani

Iran, 106 mins, 2009.

#### **Best Actor Award**

Master Tedo

Film : **'The Other Bank'**

Director: Mr. George Ovashili

Georgia/Kazakhstan, 93 mins, 2009.

### **2. FIPRESCI Awards**

#### **Diploma:**

##### **The Other Bank**

Directed by: Mr. George Ovashvili

Georgia, Kazakhstan, 93 mins, 2009

#### **Special Mention:**

##### **Gahine Shobdo ( Dark Resonance)**

Director: Mr. Khalid Mahmood Mithu

Bangladesh, 105 mins, 2010

### **3. Spirituality Section**

## **Best Fiction Award**

### **De Usynlige ( *Troubled Water* )**

Director: Erik Poppe  
Norway , 113 mins.

## **Best Documentary Award Ex Aequo**

### **Kindness – A Letter from Tibet**

Director: Clementine Ederveen  
Netherlands , 102 mins, 2009.

### **A Nun's New Habit**

Director: Robyn Hughan  
Australia , 56 mins, 2008.

## **4. Women Film Maker's Section**

### **Best Fiction Award**

### **La Bueva Nueva ( *The Good News* )**

Director: Helena Tabema  
Spain , 103 mins, 2008.

### **Best Documentary Award**

### **Persian Cat Walk**

Director: Marjan Alizadeh  
Iran , 60 mins, 2009.

## **5. Short and Independent Filmmaker Section .**

“Best Documentary Award”

PARADISO directed by Alessandro Negrini  
Ireland , 60 mins, 2009

## **6. Audience Award**

### **I am Taraneh, 15'**

Director: Rasoul Sadr Ameli  
Iran , 104 mins, 2002.

## **7. Best Juvenile Audience Award**

For the Children's Section

## **'Harun –Arun'**

Director: Vinod Ganatra

India , 75 mins.

## **INTERNATIONAL GUESTS**

A feature of most festivals is representation of international film-makers and critics. This was strongly evident in the 2010 festival. A number of directors and producers were present to accompany the screenings of their films. Film-makers and critics also served on the juries. Several of them participated in the workshops for students.

The countries represented were quite diverse. From East Asia, there were visitors from China and Japan, from South East Asia, a director from Indonesia. As would be expected, there was a strong contingent from India, ranging from Delhi to Mumbai and Assam. Pakistan was also represented as well as a large group from Iran. Bob Hercules came from the United States with a selection of his short documentaries. Visitors from European countries came from the Netherlands, France, Switzerland and Italy. There were also visitors from Australia.

Two hotels were used during the first days of the festival but, in the second half, the guests were accommodated in the one hotel. With lunches at the Dhaka Club and evening meals at the Swiss Embassy, the Australian High Commission, the Bengal Gallery, the Samar Khand Restaurant, Gulshan Club and Dhaka Club, the international group became something of a film festival community. The volunteers ensured that the visitors had transport during the festival and to and from the airport.

## **WORKSHOPS**

A special feature of the festival was the presence of film students. They attended a number of screenings and gathered for several days of workshops, organised by Mr Badal Rahman and facilitated by Indian director Mr Anwar Jamal. International visitors, including Mr Bob Hercules (US), Ms Clementine Ederveen (the Netherlands), Ms Isabelle Millard (France), Ms Robyn Hughan (Australia), Mr Steve Warne (Australia), met with the students for presentations, Q and A, and discussions. The possibilities for seeing films from other countries and cultures were a large factor for the development of the students' film experience.

## **PROMOTION**

Publicity and promotion are always a challenge for any festival. The 11 th Dhaka Film Festival produced a logo screened at the beginning of each film (along with commercials for OTOBI and GMG Airlines) as well as posters and hangings featuring information and the logos of the sponsors.

Support for the festival mainly came from Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands but also embassies from French, Switzerland and the Australian High Commission, Dhaka Club Limited as well as the local private TV Channel 1, International and interfaith support came from SIGNIS (The World Catholic Association for Communication) and the Religion Today Festival in Trento, Italy.

During the festival, a four page colourful bulletin appeared every day. Some international coverage of the festival comes from FIPRESCI (The International Association of Film Critics) in

their printed and online material. It is the same for the websites and international diffusion of information by SIGNIS and Religion Today.

With the Prime Minister opening the festival, there were reports as well as editorials in newspapers. The Daily Star featured an illustrated five page coverage of the Festival, films and guests, in its lift-out supplement. There were also news items on the closing ceremony and the awards. Reports and current information are displayed on the official website of the Festival.

#### **ACHIEVEMENT OF AIMS/ THE FUTURE**

Better Film. Better Audience. Better Society. These are the aims in the motto of the festival. During the festival of 2010, there were many better films. This means an impact on the audiences for the better. The festival opens up Bangladesh to experience world cinema. The response to art and to the cinema arts means a challenge to emotions, sensibilities, sensitivities and to the imagination which must contribute to better society.

As indicated in this report, the festival functioned more smoothly, with an interesting program and substantial presence of international guests along with the Bangladeshi public.

The 11th Dhaka International Film Festival has provided a stronger foundation for the festival of 2012.