

# PRESS RELEASE

**UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

**A FILM BY RUBAIYAT HOSSAIN**

ENGLISH TITLE:  
**UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

TITRE FRANÇAIS :  
**LES LAURIERS-ROSES ROUGES**



## SYNOPSIS

In the constantly changing city of Dhaka, Roya, an actress in her early thirties, has to face her first challenge. It has been years since she started playing the same part repeatedly, working for a stage director who now thinks she's getting too old in spite of her young age. She enters a deep introspection about her life, her art, her own desires, and her place in a patriarchal society. Rubaiyat Hossain's film provides the portrait of a woman, whose life is still under construction.





## THE DIRECTOR

Rubaiyat Hossain is one of Bangladesh's handful of female filmmakers, known for her critically acclaimed debut feature film Meherjaan (2011) which faced political and cultural wrath in Bangladesh for its anti war narrative, and its critic of masculine nationalism from a feminine point of view. Only a week after its release, the film was simply withdrawn from theatres, and is still under censorship in Bangladesh five years later.

This young director manages to mix beautiful filming with intellectual and political commitment. She graduated from Smith College (USA) where she got a bachelor's degree in Women Studies. She also obtained a M.A. in South Asian Studies from University of Pennsylvania (USA). Her primary fields of interest are Sufism, Bengali nationalism, formation of Bengali modernity and its correlation with female sexuality.

## - RUBAIYAT HOSSAIN

She also worked with NGOs to fight for Bangladeshi women's rights, and she coordinated the first international workshop about "Sexuality and Rights" in 2007 at the BRAC School of Public Health.

Currently she lives between Dhaka and New York making films and attending Tisch School of Arts at New York University in Cinema Studies.

## THE DIRECTOR'S NOTE

« Dhaka as a city is going from the rural to urban, it is in transition, visually one won't find a single road in Dhaka where a building is not being constructed. As the city is literally and figuratively under construction so are its citizen, especially the women living there. »

-- Rubaiyat Hossain

## INTERVIEW OF RUBAIYAT HOSSEIN

### *What brings you to cinema, and to direct movies?*

I have always been a visual person. As a child I wanted to be a painter. I have also been really interested in stories and spent most of my time reading. When I was young I read all of Satyajit Ray's books, after growing up I started watching his films and that was my first inspiration to want to enter the world of cinema. I felt in cinema I could combine my passion for visuals and storytelling.

### *For you, cinema and women share a lot, they have a special bond... Can you explain that?*

Yes... Cinema is a very powerful medium. It is a medium that has always used women's body to create a sense of erotic pleasure for the spectator. Women are objectified in films, thus, there is the greatest potential and urgency to challenge that notion through cinema itself.

*Your film is based after the play of one fundamental renaissance Bangladeshi author: Rabindranath Tagore. Satyajit*

### *Ray has himself been inspired by his work for his films. In what way does he appear to you as still important in the 21st century?*

When I wanted to make a film about contemporary Dhaka, I felt having Tagore's play in the backdrop would be very apt. Red Oleanders was Tagore's last play published in 1926. It was published at a time when the whole world was celebrating industrialization, but Tagore launched a critic on industrialization and capitalism in this play. I was also talking about ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh where workers work day and night for European and American corporation. These workers never meet the actual boss they work for, so the boss/king is hidden behind the net just like in the play. These workers also die in building collapse, fire accidents where their lives just become numbers. I also wanted to challenge Tagore's iconification of 'Nandini' through actual women characters who are individuals in their own right.

### *Why did you feel the need to defy Tagore on this very subject?*

The journey of the middle class women in Bangladesh is an ambitious one. The middle class women today, on the surface seem to be liberated and empowered, however, they always face a glass ceiling and a mode of silent domination from family to adhere to the traditional role of domesticity and motherhood. I wanted to take a close look at a woman's life where she was not ready to put her marriage and motherhood first, a woman who wanted to put her passion for art first. This woman is called selfish. This woman is stifled and we don't know if she will be able to hold on to her art and her work, but she is struggling. This is a woman that is me, that is my friend and women all around me. I wanted to portray this experience in film. Also I wanted to talk about how women in different social class and age group may have different notions of empowerment and freedom. In Under Construction the middle class theater actor Roya's journey and working class factory worker Moyna's journey are quite different. I wanted to juxtapose these two women to bring out the complexities of

women's experiences that can't be homogenized.

### *What can you tell us about the shooting of Under Construction?*

Shooting Under Construction was an exciting experience as I had mostly women in the crew. As the story is also centered around female characters it was great to have a team of women. We shared our personal experiences during the shoot and felt like we became a family. Sharing our experiences as women and reflecting that

*I wanted to take a close look at a woman's life where she was not ready to put her marriage and motherhood first*

in the script and filmmaking process made the journey a particularly personal one. We all felt committed to telling this story that was about women.

We had many scenes that were shot on real location in documentary style. We shot on the streets in Dhaka, in factories, in the slums, in the affluent neighborhood. Through the shoot I felt I was able to experience my city the way I had never been able to do before. As woman it's not easy to roam the streets of Dhaka, but during the shoot as

I was always surrounded by the crew I felt safe and we could be out on the streets even at 3 in the morning, which was a very liberating experience for all of us.

***What is it like a to be a woman director in Bangladesh?***

It is challenging given there are very few female directors in Bangladesh. There are only 12 women in the history of Bangladesh who made films and most of them were actors turned into directors who made one film and then disappeared. In the beginning when I started directing in Bangladesh I had to face a lot of doubts as directing is considered a man job. It was hard to get the confidence of my actors and my crew. However, as I kept working things have become a bit easier. Especially with Under Construction being released in Bangladesh earlier this year I have been appreciated by the audience and also the film community. I am a member of the Bangladesh directors guild at Bangladesh film development corporation, which gives me access to subsidized equipments, shooting floors, food during the shoot. I get a lot of positive

feedback from women which is inspiring. For example Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, the oldest women's rights organization in Bangladesh presented me with a special honor for Under Construction, which is something I treasure very much. I feel through making films I have been able to empower myself. Filmmaking has made me strong and in some sense it had made me transgress the gender barrier.

**INTERVIEW OF RUBAIYAT HOSSEIN**



# The revival of Bangladeshi Cinema

Bangladesh, located in the North East of India, became independent in 1971. Many splits punctuated its History. Starting in 1947, India and Pakistan got to share Bengal, each receiving one half according to religious distribution. Western Bengal became part of India. For the twenty years that followed, what is now Bangladesh was known as East Pakistan. In 1962, Pakistan forbade the importation of Indian films in Bengali-speaking regions: this ban lasted until Bangladesh became independent.

By using Tagore's play as the centre of her film, Rubaiyat Hossain reaffirms the links between India and Bangladesh through the Bengali culture. Although Sayajit Ray was seen as the master of the Indian-Bengali cinema, the Bangladeshi cinema got overwhelmed by blockbusters as soon as the country gained independence. The Bangladeshi film industry was then called Dhaliwood.

## **BANGLADESH- RUBAIYAT HOSSAIN**

In the 1980s, a crave for realism appeared among the Bangladeshi audience, allowing parallel cinema to develop in Bangladesh, inherited from the 1960s Indian cinema. The 1990s saw the first cinema crisis of the country: there were fewer viewers because films were only remakes of Bollywood films with a lack of ambition. Nowadays and more than ever, the Bangladeshi cinema is renewing with success!

# Both political and feminist: women as the lively force of the textile industry in Bangladesh

On April 24th 2013 occurred what is called the Dhaka catastrophe: more than 500 people died in a building where 3,000 workers were being employed. This shed a new light on the harsh and shameful life conditions experienced by workers of the textile industry. It was the worst accident ever in the whole history of the Bangladeshi industry, and it led to massive demonstrations: tens of thousands of Bangladeshi begged for justice, asking that those who owned the so-called “workshops of misery” be punished.

Bangladesh is second after China in the exportation of clothing, with 3,6 million people employed. 60% of the clothes sold in Europe come from Bangladeshi factories. Textile alone represents 80% of the total exports. 15 billion

euros are generated through this trade, but working conditions are miserable. Indeed, factories' have often been built without permit, and therefore they do not respect safety norms.

Bangladeshi textile workers are the lower paid workers across the world. Minimum wage is derisory: for a six ten-hour days a week, workers earn the equivalent of 29 euro per month. Most workers are women, some are underaged. Rapes, murders, acid burns, etc.: all the news we receive about South-Asian women is desperately violent. Bangladesh makes no exception. It is considered a place especially hostile to women in the region.

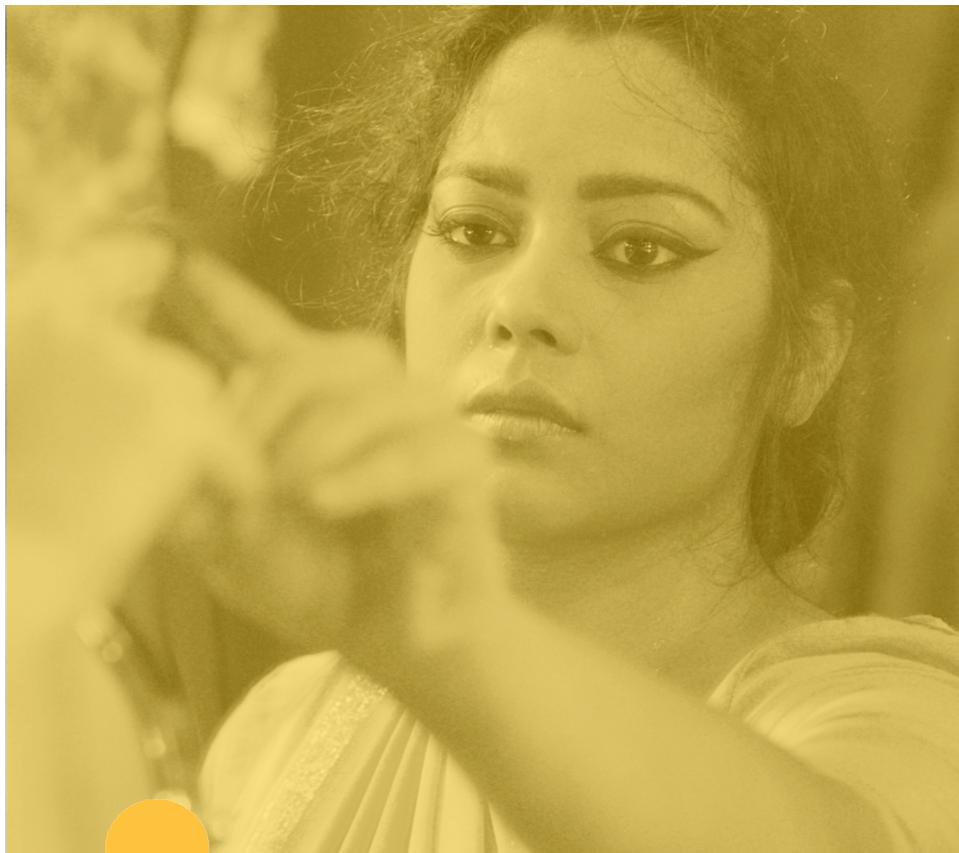
There is one major difference though: unlike its neighbours, Bangladesh has a strong textile industry, putting women at the top of the production scale.

They constitute the lively force of the country, even though their Prime Minister is a woman, but what women do for their country is neither acknowledged nor valued.

Since the Independence, women's fights for their rights has been an everyday struggle that has kept shaking the country. Discriminations against women are still present nowadays and they are still part of the Constitution, due to both Islamic and Hinduist religious oppressions. The road towards victory is still long and perilous, but, in the recent years, art and cinema have appeared as good weapons to promote change and to reach more people.



## TECHNICAL CARD



## - UNDER CONSTRUCTION

### 2015 / BANGLADESH / 88 MIN

Directing: Rubaiyat Hossain  
Scenario: Rubaiyat Hossain  
Photography: Martina Radwan  
Editing: Sujan Mahmud  
Music: Shayan Chowdhury  
Art Direction: Joya Haq, Nitee Mahbub  
Producers: Rubaiyat Hossain, Ashique Mostafa

#### CAST:

Shahana Goswami.....Roya  
Rikita Nandini.....Moyna  
Mita Rahman.....Roya's mother  
Rahul Bose.....Imtiaz Ilahi

#### TECHNICAL INFO:

Genre: Narrative Feature-Drama  
Running Time: 88 min  
Original Language: Bengali  
Available subtitles: English/Spanish/Portuguese/French  
Screening Format: DCP, HD  
Sound: Dolby Digital  
Screen Ratio: 16:9  
Country of Origin/Production: BANGLADESH  
Production Year: 2015  
Date of Premiere: June 06, 2015  
Production Company: KHONA TALKIES

## FESTIVAL

# 2016

### Seattle IFF

(New Directors Showcase/World  
Premiere)

### Stockholm Film Festival

(European Premiere)

### Montreal World Film Festival

Mostra - São Paulo IFF

### Festival de Cine de Bogotá

Calgary IFF

### Haifa Film Festival

### Heartland Film Festival

### Scottsdale IFF

St. Louis IFF

### World Film Festival of Bangkok

Phnom Penh IFF

Anchorage IFF

IFF of Kerala

(Indian Premiere)

### Chennai IFF

Pune IFF

Dhaka IFF

(Opening Film/Bangladeshi Premiere)

Trissur IFF

Bengaluru IFF

Festival de Cine de Iquique

FICA Vesoul - Festival

international des cinémas d'Asie

(French Premiere)

Festival Internacional de Cine

IBAFF

New York Asian American FF

Split – IFF for New Cinema

Jameson CineFest - Miskolc IFF

Vladivostok IFF – Pacific Meridian

Asiatica Film Mediale

Women Make Waves FF

(Opening Film)

Festival del film Locarno – Open

Doors

## AWARDS

### Prix du Jury International

(International Jury Award) at FICA Vesoul, 2016

### Prix Emile Guimet au FICA Vesoul 2016

(Emile Guimet Award) and cash award given by the Guimet National Museum of Asian Arts, Paris, at FICA Vesoul, 2016

### Mentions spéciales de la critique

(Special Mention Critic Award) at FICA Vesoul, 2016

### Best Emerging Director Award

at AAIFF 2016, New York

### Best Audience Award and the Special Mention Award

at Dhaka International Film Festival 2016

### Golden Durian Prize au Salamindanaw Asian Film Festival

Prix du meilleur film Festival Islantilla Espagne

Golden Durian Prize for best feature at Salamindanaw Asian Film Festival.

Best Film at the Festival Islantilla Cineforum

Best Emerging Director Award NY Asian American IFF

Best Film, Fusagasuga IFF

Best Film, Festival Internacional de Cine Rengo

Best Film, Festival du Film d'Asie du Sud, Paris 2016

# 2015

MORE INFOS

WEBSITE:

[http://www.contre-courants.com/portfolio\\_page/under-construction/](http://www.contre-courants.com/portfolio_page/under-construction/)

CONTACT

Hélène Kessous et Némésis Srour

[sales@contre-courants.com](mailto:sales@contre-courants.com)





Struggling to find herself in the sprawl of urban Bangladesh, Muslim theater actress Roya suffers from her husband's wish for children and traditional life. Not interested in motherhood, she decides to reconstruct a famous and politically minded play for modern times, reclaiming her identity, her freedom and her sexuality in the process.

– Locarno Film Festival