

# International Children Film Festival – Bangladesh

Children's Film Society Bangladesh

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**M**ORSHEDUL ISLAM made his filmmaking debut in 1984 while he was a student with the short film *Agami* (Time Ahead) about the war for liberation of Bangladesh. Morshedul won the Best Director award for his very first film at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Film Festival of India held in New Delhi in 1985. The film was also shown in many international film festivals.

*Agami* was the first independent short film in Bangladesh and its success contributed significantly to the establishment of an alternative film movement in the country.

He became a renowned and multi-awarded filmmaker in Bangladesh with films like *Chaka* (1993), *Dipu Number Two* (1996), *Dukhai* (1997), *Khelaghor* (2006), *Durotto* (2006), *Amar Bondhu Rashed* (2011), *Anil Bagchir Ekdin* (2015) and *Ankhi O Tar Bandhura* (2017). The films *Dipu Number Two*, *Duratwa*, *Amar Bandhu Rashed* and *Ankhi O Tar Bandhura* are all about children. He won awards for his films not only in Bangladesh but other countries as well (in addition to India, he got awards in France and Japan). He also got involved with many film societies around the world.

Morshedul attended the International Children Film Festival (ICFF) India organized by the Children's Film Society India in 2005. The international film festival in India focused mainly on films made by children, but it was organized by experienced grown-ups. He went home to Bangladesh with a wonderful idea of establishing the Children's Film Society Bangladesh (CFS). Morshedul wanted CFS to realize the idea that children could run their own activities related to filmmaking.

In a meeting held on 17 August 2006 presided over by Professor Anisuzzaman, some leading educationists, writers, cultural and film society activists of the country agreed to establish CFS. They realized the fact that film, as the most powerful medium of art of the present time, was not being properly used for the benefit of children as a strong tool of learning and entertainment.

CFS thus aimed to make an impact on the entire film industry of Bangladesh by inspiring the upcoming generation of filmmakers and offering them a bigger platform to exercise and exhibit their talent.

CFS was established as a non-profit, youth-led organization with a fifteen-member executive committee. At present, Dr. Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, a leading writer, educationist and social activist, is the President and Munira Morshed Munni, a leading female photojournalist, is the General Secretary of CFS. It has an Advisory Committee headed by eminent artist Mustafa Monwar.

### **Importance of Film**

Film is a language of people that transcends boundaries and therefore a universal medium. Through film, people can express their thoughts on anything and everything and present them to the world. CFS has always felt this urge of letting children know about this great form of art. Since the day of its establishment, CFS has been working untiringly to introduce Bangladeshi kids to the big world of cinema.

### **International Film Festival**

CFS organized on 10 September 2006 a three-day film session at the auditorium of Goethe-Institute Bangladesh. In 2008, CFS started to organize a children's film festival every year, which turned Morshedul's vision into reality. This started the International Children Film Festival (ICFF).

ICFF is the biggest and also the only International Film Festival for children and young adults in Bangladesh. This event is celebrated countrywide at more than twenty-five venues in different cities. ICFF features about two hundred films of different formats that are made for and by children and young adults from more than fifty countries. It also offers film competitions and awards for children and young filmmakers.

Selected filmmakers are invited to participate in the week-long festival in Dhaka. CFS has been using the Sufia Kamal National Public Library in Dhaka as the main venue of the film festival, though it also shows films in other venues (i.e., Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Alliance Française de Dhaka and British Council Bangladesh).

Every year, ICFE gets huge responses from many countries like India, U.S.A., U.K., the Netherlands, Canada, Iran, Nepal, Sri-Lanka, Sweden, Egypt, Bulgaria, Thailand and Mexico. In the 12<sup>th</sup> Festival (2019), hundreds of international films from more than thirty-five countries were screened. In January 2020, the 13<sup>th</sup> ICFE filmmakers from thirty-nine countries participated.

The ICFE is composed of several sections, namely:

- Child Filmmakers' Section (Under 18);
- International Film Section: Competitive (Short) with no limit on age and country;
- International Film Section: Competitive (Feature) with no limit on age and country;
- International Film Section: Non-competitive with no limit on age and country.

It includes different film types:

- Animation Film, Animation Short Film;
- Fiction Feature Film, Fiction Short Film, Documentary Film.

The film genres can be action, thriller, biography, comedy, drama, horror, musical and sci-fi.

In addition to showing films, ICFE organizes Teen Film Workshop (TFW) that provides young filmmakers direct access to leading industry professionals who conduct in-depth discussions and activities on the different sectors of filmmaking. This workshop not only broadens the young filmmakers' view on the current situation but also encourages them to start something on their own by highlighting both industry and creativity. ICFE also aims to cultivate the leadership skills of the young people.

TFW is one of the most engaging and influential additions of ICFE for teens with ages between thirteen and nineteen. It is a yearly event where participants experience making films. Any enthusiastic teenager can know almost everything from techniques of holding a camera to making a complete screenable cinema. They come with a story and get it molded and shaped into a successful film during the program. The participants get the opportunity of using the facilities for making films and having special screening of their work during the festival. The first TFW was held at CFS office in 2012 and after a break the second TFW was held in the British Council in 2017 where a huge number of teenagers participated. Mostofa Sarowar Farooki,

one of the most proficient filmmakers in the country, came to the event that year to teach about exclusive skills in film directing. In the workshop in the following year, Giasuddin Selim taught basic and expert sound inputting along with Sound Director Ripon Nath of the famous *Aynabajji* film. Nath emphasized the necessity of accurate use of sound in making films.

In the fourth TFW held in September 2019, nine instructors participated. The program ended in January 2020. Brilliant and beautiful actress Afsana Haque Mimi discussed the most important element of “acting,” as it creates a bridge between storyteller, the director and the audience. Film critic and scholar Sadia Khalid Reeti stressed the urgency of having correct script formation in the competitive world of film. Sound Director Nahid Masud instructed about the right way of incorporation of sound efficiently. Sameer Ahmed showed the importance of the most sensitive and comprehensive element in film editing which converges all other elements as a unit. Touqir Shaik showed the teens about play of lights in a film. Genius art director Uttam Guha taught the participants about the design of set and frames. Another Director, Tanvir Ahsan, taught about production design.

ICFF is a place that can turn the young people’s desire on making films into success. During the festival, workshops led by famous film figures in the country are organized for the participants. One of the greatest directors of Bangladesh, Amitabh Reza, talked about the magic tricks in his films during his workshop in the 9<sup>th</sup> ICFF. Actor and Director Taukir Ahmed enlightened the participants about the difference of small and big screens during the 11<sup>th</sup> ICFF. Mark Bishop came twice (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> ICFFs) and guided the young delegates about planning and teamwork in making films. Indian filmmaker Arun Gupta gave an analysis about the theory of filmmaking during the 11<sup>th</sup> ICFF. Another renowned Director, Giasuddin Selim, interacted with participants during the 12<sup>th</sup> ICFF in talking about his struggles as well as successful life journey. Nationally awarded actresses Nusrat Imroz Tisha and Jaya Ahsan, talented and famous television star Rafiath Rashid Mithila and traveler Nazmun Nahar also joined the ICFF at different times and motivated the participants. They relished the significance of the ICFF and its events.



Inauguration ceremony of the 12<sup>th</sup> ICFF, 2 March 2019.



School students arriving at the festival venue to enjoy the films, 12<sup>th</sup> ICFF, 4 March 2019.



School students arriving at the festival venue to enjoy the films, 12<sup>th</sup> ICFF, 4 March 2019.



General Secretary of Children's Film Society Bangladesh, Munira Morshed Munni, with a group of girl-child volunteers.



Renowned filmmaker Piplur Khan holding a workshop on making films, 12<sup>th</sup> ICFE, 3 March 2019.



Closing ceremony of the 12<sup>th</sup> ICFE, 8 March 2019.

## Child Rights

ICFF is always concerned about child rights and activities related to them. Its social film section addresses child rights and different social issues such as child abuse and early and forced marriage of children. The social film section aims to make the children become aware, understand and cope with these issues in a positive way. Some of the films shown under the social film section are the following:

- *Shoe* - an Iranian film by Gholamreza Salmani. This is a short film about a boy from a poor family. The film vividly portrays the struggle for survival of the family;

- *A Child Teacher* – an Indonesian film by Phadindra Budathoki. This film portrays the imaginary world of a kid as he escapes from his torturous teacher;
- *The Smoker* – a Bangladeshi film by Ragib Mohmud. This film tells in a funny way how smoking ends life.

There are also seminars held during the festival to address human rights issues. The seminars are held in and outside Dhaka with many child welfare activists responsibly conducting them to support and guide children through their journey in the society. Several topics have been undertaken such as women empowerment, equity for the minority, expressing thoughts and cultivating imagination, etc. Children participating in the seminars would sometimes raise questions such as “I am a girl, can I play football?” and “Why do we treat people differently in the first place, when we are all so humans?”

Some films shown in other sections of ICFE are also about child rights such as *Rickshaw Girl* and *I am George*, and some films made by the teenagers in the TFW are also about child rights and related issues such as *I am Shariful* and *Before the Law*.

### **Assessing Impact**

ICFE provides a number of benefits to children. One, they enjoy watching films. Children come to watch films with their parents holding their hands, school kids arrive using the festival’s bus or teenagers with their friends attend events. They get to know the different genres of films, get in touch with the many types of thoughts and ideas about various lifestyles. They see the courage of the kids of other countries creating beautiful cinematography with such great stories and feel inspired to make their own.

Two, they have the opportunity to compete with foreign filmmakers. Passionate young filmmakers get the chance to prove themselves in this international platform that helps them to directly interact with advanced film industries of the world. Most notably, Bangladeshi young participants never failed to amaze by winning awards in the international section. The training sessions allow them to learn about important techniques of film making from great directors, film crews and actors. This workshop is very helpful and appreciated by the young participants.



Also, by using this medium, children are telling their untold stories about education and also about their rights. Some workshops at Rajshahi addressed social problems and the participants also made films addressing those issues and showcase those films to enlighten others.

For Bangladeshi kids who cherish the ambition of contributing to the film industry, CFS and ICFE provide the perfect starting point in their life journey.

### **Golpoghor**

The seven-day annual program of the ICFE can never be enough for young filmmakers. Besides ICFE, other events and courses are organized as opportunities for learning about filmmaking and interacting with the people in the industry.

“Golpoghor” is a monthly program organized by CFS where prominent cultural personalities conduct a seminar on different topics with children and young adult film enthusiasts in Bangladesh. The first session was held on 6 September 2019 where Nuhash Humayun was the special guest. As a young generation director, Nuhash Humayun provided information about his workstyle, work ethics and goals that were helpful and easy to relate for the audience. In reply to a question, he said that he wanted to do work on good stories whether it is a telefilm or TV commercial. Spending two hours of interaction with the people with the same kind of interests, thoughts and dreams is undoubtedly a pleasing experience.

“Golpoghor” also includes topics on child rights. The children share their thoughts and stories with famous filmmakers and storytellers. They encourage each other in many ways in the process.

### **Challenges/Future Plans**

The ICFE aims to create a global platform for children and young adults all over the world who are passionate about filmmaking. It also aims to make an impact on the entire film industry of Bangladesh by inspiring the upcoming generation of filmmakers and offering them a bigger platform to exercise and exhibit their talent and also introduce them to different cultures, help them to become true leaders who can participate and change the society. Although ICFE faces many problems in terms of getting sponsorship, it is

still trying its level best to ensure the quality of the films being shown and enrich the different skills of the children.

ICFF believes that the enjoyment of the freedom of thought and expression of every child should be ensured.