



Bookworm

Evolution of nationalism and birth of Bangladesh

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A new book by veteran Australian writer John W Hood on meaningful cinema in Bangladesh deals with the country's Liberation War and how it has shaped the notion of nationhood in that country.

"The Bleeding Lotus: Notions of Nation in Bangladeshi Cinema" traces the evolution of nationalism leading to the emergence of Bangladesh and discusses in great detail the works - feature and documentary films - of all top directors of meaningful cinema of the country like Morshedul Islam, Chasi Nazrul Islam, Tanvir Mokammel, Shameem Akhtar, Tareque Masud, Humayun Ahmed, Kowser Choudhury, Sajjad Bokul, A Sajib Ashiq and Toquir Ahmed.

Many of the works of Bangladeshi directors have been shown in international film festivals across the world, with a few of them winning awards.

Overcoming the problems funds in making technically high quality films and often struggling lack of screening outlets, these directors have nonetheless stuck to the mission of making the world take note of meaningful cinema in Bangladesh.

The 200-odd page book has been published by New Delhi-based Palimpsest.

Acclaimed director Buddhadeb Dasgupta has written a blurb for the book underlining the importance of cinema in Bangladesh.

"The cinema of Bangladesh is not as well known as it deserves to be outside of its own country," he says in the opening sentence.

"Hood has done Bangladesh and its filmmakers a great service in giving us this very original work interpreting the story of a nation's birth as told through cinema," Dasgupta writes, adding that "The Bleeding Lotus" is an important contribution to cinema studies as well as to an appreciation of the agonies endured by a nation not even half a century old.

"There is a new focus on Bangladeshi cinema; the world wants to know more about its films and their makers. For the West, Bangladesh is still undiscovered and therefore has a lot to offer. "John Hood has followed the evolution of Bengali culture in its nuances and subtexts with unflinching commitment for nearly half a century. He is one of the foremost authorities on parallel cinema in both India and Bangladesh," says CEO of Palimpsest Publishers Bhaskar Roy.

Hood says his book is not a history as such, though it is concerned with historical events and historical contexts.

"Nor is it film criticism. Rather, the interest is in discussing notions of nationhood which have found expression in films made by Bangladeshi directors," he says.

On the issue of nationalism in Bangladesh, he says, "It is impossible to think of nationalism in Bangladesh without referring to the War of Liberation, a war which informs the substance of most of the films discussed here.

"For the most part, directors concerned with notions of nation bear a notable difference from directors of nationalist war films in other countries. The majority of Western war films are like histories based only on secondary sources, and where the aim is not mere propaganda, the opportunity to fictionalise is frequently grasped with unrestrained enthusiasm."

According to Hood, in Bangladesh, most of the filmmakers whose works are discussed in his book have registered in their films a direct personal response to actualities that they have, indeed, lived through.

"Their films, therefore, have a remarkable immediacy and a persuasive force given that the subject is organic to the filmmakers' own lives," he says.