

Kulada Bhattacharjee's maiden movie launched



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With an exceptional body of work in cinema and theatre behind him, veteran actor-director Kulada Kumar Bhattacharjee, a powerhouse of talent, even at the age of 85, is making his maiden feature film, which was launched at the premises of the Kamakhya Devalaya recently. A man who helped usher a new era with his innovative approaches and methods in almost every genre of theatre, Bhattacharjee, whose films include 'Sakuntala', 'Latighati', 'Chikmik Bijulee', 'Bhagya', 'Prabhati Pakhir Gaan', 'Ramdhenu', 'Surjyasta', 'Cactus', 'Dikchow Banat Palaax', 'Maj Rati Keteki', 'Village Rockstars', among others, has been closely engaged with the theatre world of Assam. He was deeply involved in making some of the most groundbreaking documentaries, over thirty of them, through 'Debjani Chaliha & Associates' while he was staying in Kolkata. The ones which made an indelible impression include 'Delightful Nature' (1972), 'Pride of Nature' (1972), 'Mopin' (1973), 'Elephant Befriended' (1974), 'Men Behind Metal' (1975), 'Danger Ahead' (1976), etc. The riveting Doordarshan serial 'Tejal Ghora' (1994), which he directed, is still remembered by viewers.

His has been a life deeply embedded in the arts, which has been for him a source of lasting joy. Kulada Kumar Bhattacharjee, who worked for three years as the Producer-in-Charge (Drama) of AIR, got admitted to the famous New Era Academy of Drama and Music in London, from where earned his diploma in Acting and Stage Technique in 1960. After completing the course, he embarked on an intensive three-month training course in production design at the British Drama League, while at the same time, he studied television direction and vision mixing from the famed Nord- und Westdeutsche Rundfunk and Fernsehen — a public radio and television broadcaster, based in Hamburg. His sojourn at the West End gave him ample opportunities to visit theatre halls, museums and bookstalls, helping him gain a deeper knowledge of the arts, while becoming acquainted with the great masters, from Renaissance to the Modern period. Bhattacharjee's ingenious direction and towering performance in the title role in Arun Sarma's absurdist play 'Nibaran Bhattacharyya' (1961), seen as a catalyst for change, produced a profound effect on the audiences. He was the first theatre personality in Assam to initiate modern techniques for the enactment of world classics, using local artistes to perform various characters that provided a rare aesthetic pleasure to the audiences.

A weakness for the arts has led this indefatigable octogenarian to wield the directorial megaphone for his maiden Assamese feature film — 'Naateshwari'. The title refers to a prostitute or an 'impure' women. The movie narrates a series of tragic incidents in a woman's life hailing from a Brahmin family, enmeshed in centuries-old tradition, and it will be shot entirely in Kamakhya — the centre of Shakti cult, atop the Nilachal Hills, which has held a deep fascination for Bhattacharjee since his childhood. The idea of making this movie took root in 2016-17 after Bhattacharjee was moved by a story called Naateshwari from the acclaimed book Nilachalor Goidya — a compilation of short stories, written by the popular 90s actress Ruplekha Devi.

‘Naateshwari’s mahurat function was presided over by Kabindra Prasad Sarma, the Doloi (priest) of the Kamakhya Devalaya Parichalana Samiti. The camera was jointly garlanded by the Devalaya’s Doloi Mohit Chandra Sarma and former Doloi Jadu Nath Sarma, while the auspicious coconut was cracked by Kabindra Prasad Sarma. The function commenced with speeches by Kabindra Prasad Sarma, Mohit Chandra Sarma and a guest — Pradip Kumar Sarma, on the occasion. Ruplekha Devi, who was presented with the Best Short Story Compilation Award by the Sadou Asom Lekhika Samaroh for ‘Nilachalor Goidya’, also spoke about her association with Kamakhya, her experiences and encounters with people living around the sacred precincts of the temple that provided her the inspiration for her stories and characters. Kulada Kumar Bhattacharjee spoke of his unswerving devotion for the place, his beliefs, motivations, and the inspiration behind the making of this movie. He was convinced about crafting a movie, while he was acting in Nanan Pachani’s mega serial ‘Damini’, some two years back. The welcome speech was delivered by the well-known actor-director Upakul Bordoloi, while his better-half Moni Bordoloi delivered the vote of thanks. Soon after the mahurat, the Doul Utsav in Kamakhya, celebrated with traditional fervour, was captured on camera.

Bhattacharjee intends to start the film in the first week of September, in keeping with the schedules of the artistes and technicians. The cast of artistes include Joy Kashyap, Kasvi Sarma and Partha Hazarika. The cinematography will be handled by Nahid Ahmed, music will be scored by Sourav Mahanta, sound designing by Bijoy Nath, art direction by Jyoti Shankar Bhattacharyya, while the film’s chief assistant director will be Upakul Bordoloi. Ruplekha Devi is also the film’s dialogue writer and subject adviser. The film’s production controller is Niren Das.

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