Bangladeshi Cinema at Home and in the World
By Sophia Purekal

The small country of Bangladesh actually has the largest film industry of any South Asian country, second to India's Bollywood. Having started the reel going in 1956, Bangladesh today produces over 80 films annually. The one problem, however, is that most of these films are low budget, full of smut, and end up flopping at the box office. Partly as an effort to uplift the culture around film, the Bangladesh Federation of Film Societies, in partnership with other organizations, has started the International Film Festival of Bangladesh. The festival brings to Dhaka artful, often socially or culturally sensitive films from all over the world. In 2003, it carried a theme of "Film for the People," and it has always been a loved event for Dhaka.

The best known of anyone who has created independent film in and of Bangladesh is Tareque Masud, whose *Matir Moina* (The Clay Bird/2002) won the FIPRESCI International Critic's Prize for Best Film at the Cannes Film Festival in 2002, and was the first Bangladeshi film to be nominated for an Academy Award. A hurtful shock to the director was the Bangladeshi government's initial censorship, reasoning that the film's depiction of life in the madrasas made it controversial. It was released after going through additional edits, and has enjoyed two successful runs in Dhaka. Masud also known for his documentary, *Muktir Gaan* (Song of Freedom/1999), about the Bangladeshi struggle for freedom in 1970/71.

With the largest expatriate Bangladeshi community in the world, London puts on a Bangladesh Film Festival that celebrated its 6th year in 2005. This festival is a collection of classic and contemporary films made in Bangladesh. The contemporary component ranges from historical/political documentaries to parallel cinema features. Though it is not clear how many also screen in Bangladesh, and how they fare there, it is very clear that there are independent filmmakers committed to showing Bangladesh in original ways.