

'Documentary has been a passion'

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Dubai-based Soniya Kirpalani, winner of the Co-Production Challenge at Cannes for her project 'Threads of Tradition', talks to City Times

AMIDST THE thousands of documentaries pitched at Cannes, Eastern filmmakers are making a mark. Dubai's own Soniya Kirpalani won the Co Production Challenge for her project 'Threads of Tradition'. A six-part series about the heartwarming journeys of five leading Asian fashion design icons, it reflects the struggle of the design fraternity as they try to save the fabric of tradition being bleached by a new wave of commercial colonialism.

Have you always wanted to be a filmmaker?

I always knew it was media that fascinated me. Graduating with Psychology and Economics gave me the depth to understand and interview my protagonists better. Documentary has been a passion and a commitment. Guided by my co-director Dhruv Dhawan I commenced my career with great focus. My inspiration was the struggle of the design industries and the struggle to break out of their sweat-shop curse.

What made you make a documentary on a subject that's normally considered frivolous?

Can you imagine a situation where nine out of ten Asian youth wear T-shirts and trousers made in their countries, exported to a foreign country, tagged with foreign taxes and labels and then sold back to them with 200% premium?

Stimulated by my interaction with the fashion fraternity of the East, I began asking questions. I shot heartwarming stories of Eastern design icons who are selflessly seeking to raise the bar by building a design quotient that will help millions break out of their 'sweat-shop' curse.



So who were your icons?

Unlikely heroes who are true visionaries; we followed Lecoanet Hemant from France to India; Bibi Russell from Bangladesh to Rajasthan, Zahra Karmostaji from UAE to the USA and Rizwan from Pakistan across borders. Through their eyes we see their fashion fraternities.

How far are you into the project?

We are already 40 % into our shoot schedule and we have also started post-production on some parts of the schedule.

Who was your biggest support?

The protagonists - each one of them shared their soul and unveiled their spirits. My family has been extremely supportive. But it's been my team whose support propelled me ahead. My writing team, spearheaded by a co-director Dhruv Dhawan and the Councils of Design, especially Mrs. Rathi Vinay Jha, Sohaila Gobhash and John Mathew of Dubai and Beth Sabol from Miami Fashion Week, Rizwan Beyg and Maheen Khan of Pakistan Fashion Council who have all been extremely encouraging. And yes my editor Vishaal whose zippy style promo gave me the edge to win.

What does it feel like winning at Cannes?

A feeling of gratefulness washed over me. It's a real honour which I seek to live up to.