

# BREAKING THE GLASS

**Moderator:** Bushra. Originally from Morocco, grew up in Abu Dhabi and was a member of the police force there, working very closely with the royal family and now representing Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia as a Line Producer, how has the transition been?

**Bushra:** Thank you for the introduction. I am very honoured to be with these amazing ladies who have actually achieved much more.



I was a part of the Abu Dhabi police which taught me a lot of things, women empowerment and how to face challenges in life. It also taught me how to be kind and humble. My earlier job was to sanction film shoots in Abu Dhabi and to promote Abu Dhabi as a filming destination for its great locations and incentive plan.

My shift to film industry was quite amazing. Working with the security has taught me how to deal with specific situations. So, when you deal with superstars or big producers, protocol-wise, you know how to manage them.

I was always fascinated by the film industry and how cinema works and how women do wonderful jobs,

whether as an actress, a producer, or a writer. Women are capable of multi tasking, from being a mother, a daughter, a sister, a CEO, or a producer. They do it all amazingly.

**Moderator:** Alankrita, Welhams, LSR, Jamia, it must be very easy for you to get into the business? (chuckles)

**Alankrita:** I have been very fortunate because my education prepared me to be able to do whatever I want to do.

I feel that, my education has contributed a great deal to the kind of films that I am interested in making. I feel very empowered to be able to tell the stories that I believe in and to make films from a more female perspective.



I feel it's very important for me to tell stories that mean something to me and are interesting. So, the choice of the stories and how I tell them, has definitely been shaped a lot by my education, by the books that I have read and the family that I come from.

**Moderator:** Leena ji, you think there is a glass ceiling or are we just, over exaggerating the situation?

**Leena:** When I started, there were very few women. I was trying to be a woman editor. I faced lots of incidents, which actually made me stronger.



But now, I truly believe that, the main villain here is conditioning. However, on a film set, you don't really care who's a man and who's a woman as long as they are delivering. At one point it all disappears... That is the space that I like to create on my sets now.

**Moderator:** With your long experience, what would your advice be, to a person who wants to join the business today?

**Leena:** When I joined, this industry was very family-driven and outsiders were not really welcome.

**Moderator:** Are you talking about nepotism?

**Leena:** I don't believe in nepotism. But it was difficult for people to enter from the outside because you don't even know what was an entry point.

It is what it is! But it has changed now. Right now, I think there are too many people wanting to do jobs here, which requires a lot of luck along with ability.

# CEILING

Against the backdrop of passing of the historic Narishakti bill by the Indian parliament, IIFTC Knowledge Series delves into how women are crossing barriers and breaking the glass ceilings in private enterprise where there is no women's reservation. Here every woman achiever has her own unique story about what it takes to succeed in a male dominated film and entertainment industry.

**Moderator: Dr. Bhuvan Lall**  
Celebrated Author, Filmmaker, Entrepreneur & Biographer of Subhas Bose, Har Dayal, Sardar Patel

Ability will make you survive but not necessarily the best person gets the job. There are a lot of other considerations.

**Moderator:** Zuzana? You think there is a glass ceiling or are we just over-exaggerating? Is it same in Europe?



**Zuzana:** Yeah, I must say that the landscape is changing. Obviously in the past, females were under represented in the film industry. Now a days, thanks to the European funds and institutions, the situation is changing because they have quotas.

I was thinking whether in Slovakia we have more female workers in the film industry. I always thought we have a balance but then when I looked at the

data, I found out that it is not true. Perhaps, I had that impression because the females have a stronger voice in my country. Female producers and film makers always stand up and say what they want to say. But in Slovakia this change didn't come from above or from the government, it came from the bottom.

**Moderator:** Nupur, you agree with all of them?

**Nupur:** Of course, everyone has similar stories but the data that came out last year was quite horrifying. There were only 10% of women across all heads of dept, whether it's directing, cinematography, editing, writing etc.

There are many reasons for not having enough women in the industry. It's not that women are less interested or there is less talent. There is some kind of systemic discrimination which is present, but it's never spoken about.

There's this quiet, non-verbal, sort of social distrust where women are concerned. Because film making is a very fast-paced environment, can she handle the pressure? I mean, come on, if women can have babies, they can handle the pressure. (applause)

Talking about families, when you are making a film, you are battling the world, raising finances, actually making it, getting it to the theatres. But women traditionally are supposed to



run their homes, right? So if you don't have a supportive spouse or family, how on earth are you going to shoot 16 hours a day leaving your kids at home? So, you need a very supportive family.

I have had female asst. directors who wanted to be directors but they ultimately joined production companies. What happened? Both my films were shot by women cinematographers but women cinematographers still struggle to work with male directors because of that distrust. That's a social construct.

So, these things are never spoken about but it's systemic. It's in Hollywood, it's here, it's in Europe, it's everywhere...



**Leena:** But it's never out in a conversation, it's not something that we even talk about.

**Moderator:** But we must. I'm shocked... only 10 per cent?

**Alankrita:** No, actually, I think it's even lesser according to the report

**Nupur:** We all would have noticed that when women are green lighting or directing, their number in the unit goes up. When I started as an assistant director, I was the only girl on the set apart from the hairdresser and the actress but things have moved. We are fortunate to work with a lot of women.

**Leena:** We have seen times when make-up was a no-women department, so was camera but now women are taking over both these departments competently.

**Moderator:** But are there still any no go areas, you think?

**Nupur:** Oh yes, action films? If there is a male director and a female director, both have never made an action film, guess who's going to get that job? As a woman I think, in film making we have to prove ourselves just that extra bit because the potential of a man is more valid than the experience of a woman.

**Alankrita:** I also think budget is a big criteria. As women we feel so on the back foot about even thinking of something which has a huge budget

For decades film making has been controlled by men who were the producers, the directors, the writers, and the deciders. And the audience is also used to watching films with a huge budget. So, when a woman wants to make a movie with a female protagonist, it doesn't do well. It comes from a historical discrimination against women wanting to tell their stories.

Even the representation of women in front of the camera is determined by the fact that there are not enough women behind the camera. So, I feel eventually more women need to have a power behind the camera.

**Nupur:** Just to add to that, when there are women writers or directors depicting women on screen, their characters definitely have more depth.

**Moderator:** I have a friend in London, Gurinder Chaddha, who made 'Bend it like Beckham'. It was a difficult film to make, but it did break the glass ceiling.

**Leena:** The 90s taught us to be politically correct. On the surface level, it feels like, things are changing. But has it really?

**Moderator:** Same experience for Europe or for your part of the world?

**Bushra:** In Abu Dhabi especially, the priority goes to the women to lead in every field actually. They can be ministers, film directors or producers. In fact, they are supported financially, emotionally to progress. I think that is the vision of the leaders. So we are blessed to be a part of that.

**Moderator:** Would you like to speak about your experience in Saudi?

**Bushra:** Our experience in Saudi Arabia has been amazing because we have done a lot of work with the Saudi government. Again, the women there have a priority to lead in every field. They are given the support financially and in every step of the way.

In my company in Abu Dhabi, I have to support the women and show that in my report. You will be amazed to see a lot of women in higher positions including ministers and heading huge organization and leading the country.

**Moderator:** Zuzana?

**Zuzana:** You mentioned budgets, which is another controversial factor. When there is a female or a male director, the wages are completely different. So, I think it's unfair and it under estimates the female workforce.

**Leena:** I mean, this itself is so refreshing to hear. To have Bushra from Abu Dhabi speak like this about owning that power is really refreshing.

**Moderator:** So, in terms of pay parity in India, the male directors or DOPs have different standards?

**Leena:** I think so. Basically, who decides budgets? So obviously, the rest, you can't even question.

**Moderator:** Even the female stars get less money irrespective of the fact that it may be a female-led subject?

**Nupur:** Then it's different. It has lot to do with the economics, whether it's theatrical release, or not, it's a bit complex.

**Alankrita:** If it's a big female star, then obviously she is going to be paid more.

**Leena:** But definitely not even close to what a male star is paid in a big movie.

**Alankrita:** The budget of those films which are led by a female star will be lesser because they say that film will not recover (investments).

**Moderator:** Is that a present mind set that a woman's film will not work ?

**Alankrita:** So basically, for the whole pay parity excuse, they always explain it logically by talking about the economics. I think it's very important to destroy the myth of this economics because it doesn't exist in a vacuum.

**Moderator:** You know, it's not a ceiling. It's a big hard wall, which has been existing for a very long time.

**Bushra:** There are some females who broke the rules here. Priyanka Chopra is one of them.

**Alankrita:** She definitely is.

**Nupur:** Then you are talking about a different level, we are talking more about entry level.

**Alankrita:** The film with the big male star will definitely have a way larger budget. That's the norm. But if the more films are led by women, the more it will create that audience, who will be ready pay to watch them.



# FILMS

Accounting And Legal | Production Planning | Location Scouting  
Labs and Transfers | Post-Production | Accommodation, Travel and Transport  
Permits Scouting | Catering | Production Office Rentals | Set Construction  
Sound Stages / Studio Rentals | Equipment Rentals | Casting | Pre-Production

Film Your Next Project In Abu Dhabi & Saudi Arabia  
With Red Films To Avail 30% Rebate

Corporate Headquarter: Twofour54, Building No 6, Abu Dhabi U.A.E.  
T: +971 2 635 6646 | M: +971 52 909 2458 | [info@redfilms.ae](mailto:info@redfilms.ae)