

ZOO films & Les Films de l'œil sauvage  
present

# THINGS I COULD NEVER TELL MY MOTHER

a film by  
HUMAIRA BILKIS

## PRESS KIT



**World Premiere**  
Visions du réel  
2022



états généraux  
du film documentaire  
• ardecheimages.org

**French Premiere**  
États Généraux  
du Documentaire de Lussas 2022

**Contact**  
Production and filming

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Distribution

Les Films de l'œil sauvage  
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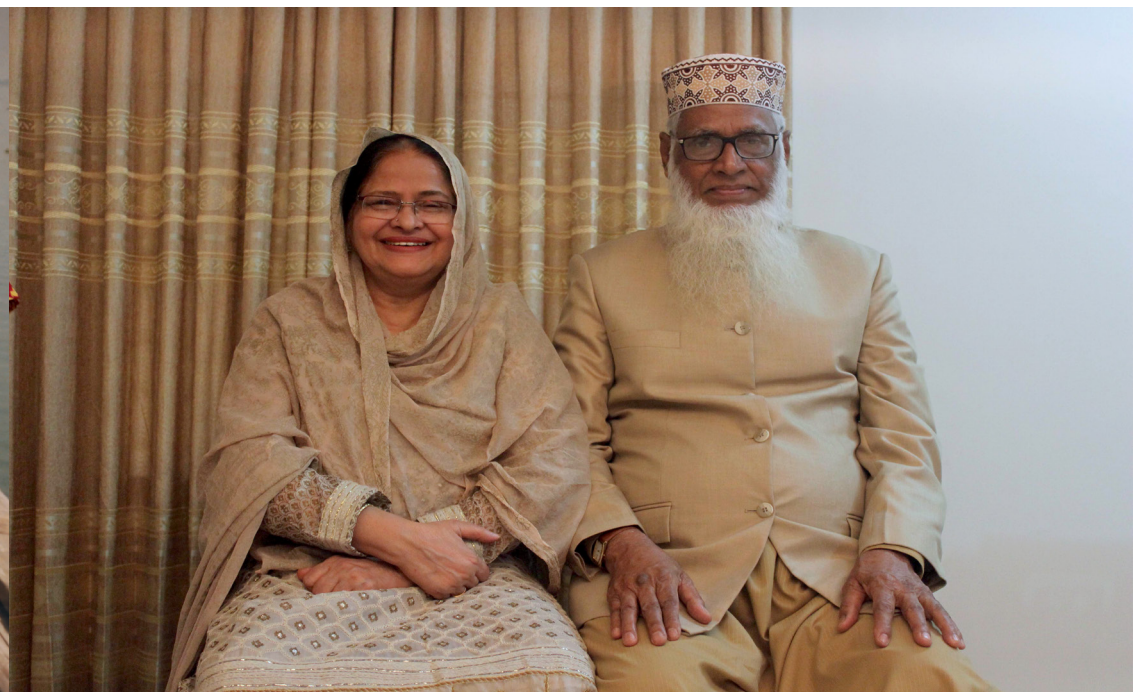
## TRAILER LINK

► <https://vimeo.com/736231784>

## TECHNICAL SHEET

<b>Title</b>	Things I Could Never Tell My Mother
<b>First release</b>	April 2022 (Visions du réel Festival, Switzerland)
<b>Length</b>	80 minutes
<b>Image format</b>	16/9 - Color - 2K
<b>Country of production</b>	Bangladesh, France
<b>Shooting Location</b>	Dhaka, Bangladesh
<b>Language</b>	Bengali
<b>Subtitles available</b>	English and French





## LOGLINE

Since her pilgrimage to Mecca, my mother has changed profoundly. Now cloistered at home and obsessed with religion, the inspired poetess of my childhood refuses to accept that I have become a filmmaker and only thinks about one thing: me getting married.

## SYNOPSIS

This film tells the story of my relationship with my parents, especially my mother, while we are living under one roof in Dhaka, Bangladesh. For a long time, my mother was a passionate artist. She passed on to me her love of poetry, theater, and film, which became my profession. But ever since she made the Hajj, the great Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, in 2002, she has changed profoundly. She now lives cloistered in our apartment, following the precepts of Sharia law, rejecting the richness of her previous life. She keeps urging me to get married and to stop making films, since Islam forbids any human representation. When she suggests that we undertake the Hajj together, I accept her invitation: it will be an opportunity for us to resolve our differences, but it will also be the time for me to announce to her that I am in a relationship with a Hindu man. But the COVID-19 pandemic makes our trip impossible. Forced to live behind closed doors with my parents as their health deteriorates, I try to come to terms with what my mother and I still have in common.





### ইচ্ছে করে ... I Wish...

ইচ্ছে করে অন্য কোথাও চলে যাই অন্য কোনোখানে	I wish to move along to somewhere else
যেখানে নেই কোন সন্ত্রাস, ভয়াবহ পরিবেশ	Where no terror and panic exist
আছে সুন্দর জীবনের মানে	Only the harmony of life will belong
যেখানে নীল আকাশে সাদা মেঘের ভেলা যায় ভেসে	Where soft clouds move along
যেখানে তারার মেলায় পরীরা গান গায় হেসে	Starry nights are decorated with a fairy smile
রোজ সকালে পাখীরা গান করে সুমধুর সুরে	Morning begins with birds' chirping
ফুলকলিরা আঁধি মেলে চায়, প্রজাপতি যায় উড়ে	Where butterflies play with the blooms
যেখানে নদীর জলে নৌকো যায় ভেসে পাল তুলে	Boats sail through soft breeze
রাজহংসীরা গ্রীবা বাকিয়ে চলে যায় হেলে দুলে	Swans step merrily
যেখানে বিশাল শস্য ক্ষেতে সবুজ ফসলের সমারোহ	Where cornfields expand to the skyline
দুর্ভিক্ষে যেথা সোনার মানুষ মরেনা অহরহ	No one suffers from famine
এমন স্বপ্নময় দেশে আমি চলে যাবো অবশেষে	I am sure I will be in that land of dreams someday
যেখানে দূরের আকাশ নেমে এসে দিগন্ত রেখায় মেশে।	Where the blue sky kisses the happy horizon.

Poem by my mother, Khaleda Bilkis









## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

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I was born in the 1980's. A decade earlier, my country, Bangladesh, won its independence. In more concrete terms, Bangladesh forms the ethnolinguistic part of the region of Bengal, which was divided during the Partition of India in 1947. Two countries were formed on the basis of religion: India and Pakistan. Pakistan had a Bengali Muslim majority. The country now known as Bangladesh fell under Pakistani rule as East Pakistan. That harmony was short-lived due to Bengali nationalism and pro-democracy movements in East Pakistan. At the cost of great suffering, my country gained independence, breaking away from the dominant nation to build its own society based on modern culture as well as the uninterrupted practice of Islam.

Bangladesh has a Sunni Muslim majority. Islam in this nation is nourished by a rich and ancient artistic and literary culture. For a long time, Islam in Bangladesh was a syncretic religion, full of local rituals and beliefs, and quite different from the austerity found elsewhere. But with the introduction of martial law, the Islamization of political and public institutions progressed until 1988, when General Ershad declared Islam to be the state religion. This was the beginning of a slow but continuous transformation. The Muslim community - 89% of the country's total population - follows and practices Shariah, or Islamic Law, in civil activities such as property transactions, marriage, and divorce. But the rest of the community, including the 10% Hindu minority as well as other groups, practice standard law as per the constitution of Bangladesh.

.../...



The country has practiced secularism since its inception, but its inner harmony was wrecked by the enforcement of martial law and the definition of a state religion.

These changes have profoundly affected individuals' lives, especially the lifestyle of women. Their daily lives are punctuated by numerous rituals, restrictions, and proscriptions. The wearing of the purdah, the Bangladeshi hijab, has become widespread. Madrasa schools are multiplying, and religious education has spread. A system of rigid and dogmatic values has influenced the mentality of Bangladeshi youth.

The preaching of the most radical imams resounds through the streets of the capital. Since 2013, my country has experienced an upsurge in

tensions provoked by Muslim fundamentalists; violence against foreigners, secularists, opponents, moderates, and other religious communities is increasing. In 2016, an attack killed 29 people in a bakery in Dhaka.

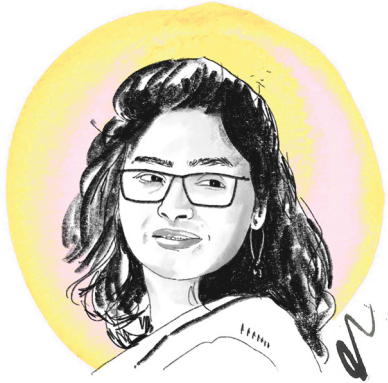
After studying filmmaking in India, I returned to Bangladesh, where I strengthened my reconnection to my homeland and came to grips with a few different realities. I noticed that my own mother, once an extraordinarily unprejudiced woman and exalted artist, had become obsessed with Shariah law, adopting the practice of extreme Islamic rituals.

**THINGS I COULD NEVER TELL MY MOTHER** is about our reunion. Long separated by distance and now divided by our beliefs, we must learn to understand and respect one other again.



# BIOGRAPHIES

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## **Humaira Bilkis** | Filmmaker and Producer

Humaira Bilkis is a Dhaka-based independent filmmaker and producer. Her early forays into filmmaking are informed by a critical reading of media, culture, gender, and development issues—arising from her academic background in Mass Communication and Journalism. She graduated from the Creative Documentary program at Sri Aurobindo Center for Arts and Communication in New Delhi.

Bilkis explores the complexity of human relationships through an observational approach. Her work tends to be self-reflexive; **THINGS I COULD NEVER TELL MY MOTHER** is her most in-depth work in this domain.

As an associate producer and director, she has worked on a wide range of projects, including with the Oscar-winning filmmaker Sharmin Obaid Chinoy and the Japan Broadcasting Corporation.



## **Quentin Laurent** | Producer

Quentin Laurent founded Les Films de l'œil sauvage with Frédéric Féraud in 2015. Based in Paris and Marseille, the company mainly produces art-house documentaries. Trained as a geographer, Quentin Laurent is particularly interested in non-Western narratives and viewpoints, using approaches that call contemporary society into question, and that seek to shed light on shadowy areas, taboos, or forgotten spaces. Notably, he has recently produced or co-produced **Kinshasa Makambo** by Dieudo Hamadi (Berlinale 2018), **Overseas** by Soa Yoon (Locarno 2019), **Aswang** by Alyx Arumpac (IDFA awarded 2019), **Downstream to Kinshasa** by Dieudo Hamadi (Cannes 2020), **Dreaming Walls** by Amélie Van Elmbt and Maya Duverdier (Berlinale 2022) and **Kristos, the last child** by Giulia Amati (Venice 2022).



## **Léa Chatauret** | Editor

After studying sociology and political science in France, Léa completed the cinema program at INSAS in Belgium. There, she studied editing, in both fiction and documentary work, and has since become interested in other forms of writing, particularly for audio formats. She works as an editor specializing in auteur films.

Her editing work includes **I See Red People** by Bojina Panayotova, **The Kiosk** by Alexandra Pianelli, and **Knowing How to Count** by Marina De Van.











# CREDITS

<b>Director</b>	Humaira Bilkis
<b>Screenwriter</b>	Humaira Bilkis
<b>In collaboration with</b>	Léa Chatauret and Quentin Laurent
<b>Image</b>	Humaira Bilkis
<b>Sound</b>	Humaira Bilkis
<b>Editing</b>	Léa Chatauret
<b>Sound editing and mixing</b>	Olivier Chane
<b>Grading</b>	Axelle Gonay
<b>Original Music</b>	Tajdar Junaid
<b>Producer &amp; line producer</b>	Humaira Bilkis - Zoo Films (Bangladesh)
<b>Producer and Creative Producer</b>	Quentin Laurent - Les Films de l'œil sauvage (France)
<b>Contact for distribution</b>	Les Films de l'œil sauvage - films@oeilsauvage.com

## Support

Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée  
Régions Sud & Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes  
Procirep – Société des Producteurs & ANGOA  
Bourse "Brouillon d'un rêve" de la SCAM & le dispositif "La Culture avec la Copie Privée"  
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Ministry of Information and Broadcasting People's Republic of Bangladesh

- Pitched at **BERLINALE DOC STATION, DOCEDGE KOLKATA AND DHAKA DOC LAB** -

