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Ajita Suchitra Veera's film in Oscar contention

[Karthik Pasupate](#), TNN | Jan 4, 2014, 11.45PM IST

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India's much celebrated official nomination for 86th Academy Awards may have fallen out of contention in the nominees for the best Foreign Film category. But Ajita Suchitra Veera, a little known Hyderabad-based filmmaker is keeping the Indian flag flying at the Oscars with her maiden feature film, *Ballad of Rustom*, which has made it to the Oscars Reminder List in the Best Picture category.

This is the second time Ajita's film has made it to the Oscars. Her student short film, *Notes on Her*, was India's official entry in the Shorts section in 2003. Ajita Suchitra Veera is understandably over the moon. "It feels great to have been shortlisted from over 4000 films from across the world. It is a huge endorsement for independent Indian cinema. What's most gratifying is that the film has been selected for the craftsmanship and technical quality," shares Ajita.

The movie is a contemporary tale that captures the magical life of an ordinary telephone lineman, Rustom who loves to carry out scientific experiments. Set in an unnamed small township in India, "the movie is about imagination, dreams, passion for life, love, hope and despair," explains

Ajita, who believes it is the unconventional storytelling and the use of cinematic tools that make watching the movie a surreal experience.

After passing out of FTII, she had a few offers to make mainstream films, but Ajita wanted to make films that use novel cinematic tools to portray a whole new world on celluloid.

Shot on 35 mm film with live sound, the filmmaker used a special processing technique called 'bleach bypass' to create a dreamlike visual quality. "The film is constantly shifting between reality and dreams of Rustom. We couldn't have achieved that painting like quality with digital cameras," says Ajita, adding, "We did not even use DI and edited it the traditional way of cutting the negative. We used the bleach bypass technique to achieve a desaturated, hi-contrast look for the visuals that give it the feel of a painting."

Shot in Coorg (Karnataka), the film captures 'life in the countryside', which offers a magical backdrop for the protagonist's isolated, picture-postcard hut. Ajita lived with the film for over three and-a-half years, founding her own production house. "It took me six months of extensive auditioning to find my character. It took four months to shoot as we wanted the mist and haze because of which we were shooting only in the early mornings and evenings. We worked on the sound for over two years. I wanted a Western classical feel to the score, so we used live instruments like the cello, accordions, violins," says Ajita, who did not use a single digital sound in the movie.

In November 2013, the young filmmaker was awarded the prestigious Indibor Bose Award for Excellence in Cinema, by the Film Society founded by Satyajit Ray. Ajita is the only director to have won the award in over 45 years. "It was extremely overwhelming, especially because Satyajit Ray's films have had a great impact on my journey as a filmmaker. I was compared to the likes of David Lynch and Tarkovsky when the film was screened in Kolkata," beams Ajita, who takes pride in her Hyderabad roots.

Her father is a graphic artist, photographer and cartoonist. "I spent much of my childhood doing design layouts, printing photographs, and watching films with dad. I studied in Nasr school and then St Ann's college," she says signing off.

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