Heart of the matter

Filmmaker Meghna Gulzar, who was in the city last week, tells Arwa Janjali that she would rather have her films being ahead of its time than lag behind.

As the daughter of revered writer-lyricist-director Gulzar and eye-witness Rathee—one of the most beautiful and sensitive actresses of her time—Meghna Gulzar surely has had a tough legacy to live up to. We catch up with the writer-director while she was in the city to attend the Film Fest '09 on Saturday and she agreed there was a certain burden she felt. “When your parents have a body of work, there are a lot of expectations that you have to live up to,” she says. Nevertheless, she seems secure in her space and is in no tearing hurry for fame.

After Filhaal and Just Married, Meghna’s last directorial venture was one of the ten short stories starring Amrita Singh and Minissha Lamba, titled Poornamasi, in Sanjay Gupta’s Des Kahaniyaan after which one hasn’t heard from her at all. Meghna provides an instant explanation, “Well, I write my own scripts. So it does take a while. I am working on two scripts currently, which should materialise this year.”

Talking about Filhaal and Just Married, both films got their share of critical acclaim but failed at the boxoffice. But Gulzar’s talented daughter has no regrets, “I can’t think about the box-office fate while making a film. I might as well get that and be true to my craft and sensibility. My films have a certain restrained sensibility, which may not go down well with everyone. They are not flamboyant. A lot of people told me that Filhaal (which was based on surrogate motherhood) had a strong message but was ahead of its time. But I had rather be ahead of time rather than lag behind. Besides I am no flag bearer. I make films that interest me and move me.”

Seeing the evolution that has come about in the industry, Meghna is only glad. She is not only thankful for the kind of cinema that is being appreciated now but also because at least a handful of female directors have taken center-stage as filmmakers. “Fortunately things in the Hindi film industry are very different now. The language of cinema is changing, thanks to the new breed of producers, including corporates who have entered the scene. The stereotypical films have come of age. Also, when I started off eight years ago, there were hardly any women around to call the shots. But today there are quite a few,” she says.

But in a general sense, Meghna doesn’t see the need to categorise men and women directors separately. “Frankly, this entire comparison between male and female directors is created by the media. I don’t think the difference really exists. As a filmmaker, when I am working on a film, I don’t see myself as a woman. Gender goes out of the window or else I will never be able to do justice to the male characters in my film. Take Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s example. When you see his films, all of which have strong women protagonists, you see the essence and emotions of women in the most beautiful manner. It would be hard to imagine that it was a man who made it. Same is the case with women directors. Though I agree that the films made by women would be slightly different as far as the texture and sensibility is concerned, but that isn’t such a bad thing really,” states the straightforward filmmaker.

Out of the recent films that she has watched, Meghna is all praise for Zoya Akhtar’s Luck By Chance and Danny Boyle’s Slumdog Millionaire. “I loved Luck By Chance. And Slumdog... had one of the most commendable screenplays. The screenplay was the silent star of that film,” she says.

Talk about her father being nominated for the Oscars for the lyrics of the song Jai Ho in Slumdog Millionaire and the proud daughter is elated. “I am very excited and immensely proud of him. But being the person he is, he won’t go for the awards,” she says a tad disappointed. So would she have gone for the awards? “I would have definitely gone to make the most of the moment, only if my father would have accompanied me. I will never go on behalf of him,” she signs off.