

## Critical acclaim not enough: director Tanuja Chandra

Director Tanuja Chandra, whose films have been critically acclaimed but have failed to set the box office on fire, says she wants to make and script better movies that appeal to the masses and not just art house audiences.

Bespectacled and wearing a broad smile on her child-like face, Chandra, by her own admission, has a leaning towards 'women-centric films' but is careful not to become too preachy.

'It's true that I have a leaning towards stories in which the woman plays the protagonist. Take, for instance, 'Zindaggi Rocks', in which Sushmita Sen played the central character of a foster mother. But I am careful not to become too ideological because then the audience won't connect,' Chandra told IANS over a chat in the capital.

In Delhi to support the cause of street children who have been campaigning for their right to education, Chandra said although making films on social issues is close to her heart, she will now concentrate on ensuring stronger scripts so as to appeal to the masses more widely.

'Zindaggi Rocks' was based on the issue of adoption. I like making such movies but I don't want them to just be accepted by a certain section of the art house audience...they must be accepted by all,' said Chandra, who is in her 30s.

Her latest film, 'Hope And A Little Sugar', set against the 9/11 backdrop and in English, has earned critical acclaim. Starring Anupam Kher and Mahima Chowdhury, it bagged the best feature film award at the New York Film Festival and the California Film Festival.

But this film, released last month, has also got a cold response at the box office.

Having started her directorial career with the TV series 'Zameen Aasmaan' in 1995, Chandra then wrote the screenplay of the hugely commercially successful film 'Dil To Pagal Hai'.

She also wrote the screenplay of 'Zakhm' and 'Dushman' - both of which were appreciated by the critics but fared poorly at the box office. Similar was the fate of her other films, 'Sangharsh', 'Sur' and 'Zindaggi Rocks'.

Incidentally, Chandra is the sister of celebrated US-based author Vikram Chandra and film critic Anupama Chopra.

She said: 'I will now concentrate on my next project, a period love story based in the 1960s. The script has been written by my mother, Kaamna Chandra, who had also written scripts for other films like 'Prem Rog' and 'Chandni'.

'Until now I have been very busy with the promotion of 'Hope...', but from next month, it will be all about the next film, deciding the cast, shooting - hopefully it should be released by the year end,' Chandra said.

*Azera Rahman* ( © IANS / India eNews)