

Indian actress nominated for top British award

Delhi girl Tannishtha Chatterjee has been nominated for best actress in the British Independent Film Awards for her leading role in the controversial movie 'Brick Lane', pitting her against established stars like Dame Judi Dench and Anne Hathaway.

Chatterjee, a 29-year-old graduate of the National School of Drama in Delhi, plays the role of Nazneen in 'Brick Lane' -- an adaptation of the best-selling novel by Bangladesh-born author Monica Ali.

An overjoyed Chatterjee said Tuesday: 'It's my first British film and I've been nominated -- you can't get better than this.'

The nominations for the best actress also include Dame Judi Dench ('Notes from a Scandal'), Anne Hathaway ('Becoming Jane') and Sophya Myles ('Hallam Foe').

The maker of 'Brick Lane' Sarah Gavron was nominated for best director alongside David Cronenberg ('Eastern Promises') and Anton Corbijn ('Control').

Brick Lane is the name of a winding and colourful east London street that is populated mostly by ethnic Bangladeshis and is famous in Britain for the Indian curry restaurants that line both sides of the street.

The story centres around Nazneen, a Bangladeshi girl who comes to Britain as a teenager for an arranged marriage with a much older man. In the course of her life in London -- she has daughters who grow up to be temperamental teenagers -- she meets and falls in love with Karim, an Islamic radical.

The film became controversial when a small group of east London Bangladeshis protested what they called the stereotyping of local immigrants, prompting the filmmakers to relocate from Brick Lane.

Prince Charles and Camilla then pulled out of a royal gala of the film amid security concerns that they may become targets of protests.

Chatterjee, however, said Tuesday that there had been a very good response from screenings attended by members of the Bangladeshi community in London.

'I honestly don't find anything controversial in the film. Most of the people who are reacting obviously haven't seen it and haven't read the book. They have to see it,' she said.

Author Monica Ali, in a recent article in The Guardian, blamed 'media distortions' for the controversy whipped up around the film, saying most of the so-called protesters had not read the book, and therefore had no idea what they were protesting against.

'And I am aware that given the nature of the press coverage, and the rumours circulating that, for example, the film would show a leech falling into a curry pot in a Brick Lane restaurant (which doesn't happen in either novel or film), people who haven't read the book are now much more likely

to feel hostile towards it,' Ali wrote in an article titled 'The Outrage Economy'.

Ali revealed that Chatterjee was the first person to be auditioned for the role of Nazneen, and that 'though the director and producers immediately thought she was great, she had to wait until they'd satisfied themselves by seeing a lot of other actors'.

The author has high praise for Chatterjee's performance, saying, 'Somehow she manages to convey an interior life through looks and gestures, and she also seems to get more beautiful as the film goes along, as if in some outward expression of an inner state of being.'

The winners will be announced Nov 28.

Dipankar De Sarkar (© IANS / India eNews)