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### HONOREE:

#### Storytelling with Saris

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##### *Honoree Proposal Description:*

Storytelling with Saris follows the courageous efforts of the women of Katakali, Bangladesh to adapt to climate change and rising sea levels in their island village.

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##### *Organization Website:*

<http://storytellingwithsaris.com/>

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**TREATMENT**  
RISING UP TO CLIMATE CHANGE: STORYTELLING WITH SARIS

**Logline:**

RISING UP TO CLIMATE CHANGE: STORYTELLING WITH SARIS follows the courageous efforts of the women of Katakhalī, Bangladesh to adapt to climate change and rising sea levels in their island village. Through performance art and advocacy workshops around the globe, communities are inspired to take action to prevent devastation of our planet and the imminent displacement of 30 million Bangladeshi people.

**Synopsis:**

RISING UP TO CLIMATE CHANGE: STORYTELLING WITH SARIS features the resilience, struggles and achievements of four Bengali Muslim women—Nasima, Noor Sehera, Zakia, and Matoara—from Katakhalī, Bangladesh, a pristine island community in the Bay of Bengal. The village is on the frontline of climate change. Through the lens of a collaborative sari art-making and journaling project, Bangladeshi-American artist Monica Jahan Bose uses the women's sari art and her advocacy work to inspire global communities to make positive change.

The film looks beyond the doomsday scenarios and statistics, instead highlighting individual stories to create empathy and emotional connection that triggers positive change.

Statistics about climate change can seem overwhelming:

- Antarctica lost approximately 36 cubic miles of ice in a three-year period.
- Many island nations and low-lying areas are projected to be under water by mid-century.
- The U.S. has contributed to more than a quarter of our planet's carbon emissions, and our per person emissions are many times higher than emission of Asians or Europeans.
- Humans have already increased overall global temperatures by almost 1 degree Celsius, and a total increase of 2 degrees will lead to catastrophic irreversible changes to our planet.

Katakhalī Village (population 1,500) has no roads, cars, or running water, and is off the electric grid. It is located on Barobaishdia Island (population 27,000), which is in Patuakhali District in southern Bangladesh. It takes 28 hours by ferry and river boat to reach the village from Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. The women in the film are all Muslim and members of a cooperative, where they learn reading, writing, sari design, and other skills, including climate adaptive farming and fisheries. Most of them were married before adulthood and denied education due to their gender. The island is being battered by stronger and more frequent cyclones and warming and rising seas, resulting in crop failures and a drastic reduction in fish. Bangladesh contributes only 0.06% to the overall annual carbon emissions on our planet, yet

with one meter of sea level rise Bangladesh is projected to lose 17% of its land and displacement of 30 million people.

Through their carbon neutral lifestyle, Katakhalī and its residents show industrialized nations how to adapt to and reverse climate change. Noor Sehera is a tailor and has installed a solar panel to enable her to work at night to support her college student daughter, the first in her family to finish high school. Nasima is learning new adaptive farming techniques and holding her ground in her riverfront home, despite losing her plants and animals to successive cyclones. Zakia is an energetic grandmother, demonstrating her new skills at organic composting and already staking out a plot of land for her grandchild's future home.

The community gathers together in a climate knowledge sharing workshop, outlining the changes they have experienced and learning for the first time that climate change is a global phenomenon. Matoara, the cooperative's leader, now understands the reasons for climate change, concluding that the "world has a fever" and we need to cool it down by using less energy and planting trees. The women share their lives with us as climate change evolves, which they also record in journals and stunning, expressive saris. **They embrace life and move towards gender equality despite the uncertainty about the survival of their community.** Bose and her mother Noorjahan (both immigrants to the US who initiated the eco-empowerment cooperative in the village in 2000) appear in the film to introduce their ancestral homeland to viewers, creating a bridge between Americans and **Bangladesh**.

The saris are used for collaborative performances and workshops in Bangladesh, the U.S., and Europe, bringing the women's stories to the world. Inspired by the Katakhalī women, American and European collaborators write actionable pledges to reverse climate change and its effects directly onto their own sari creations. Pledges include: "I will bike more," "I will compost," and "I will install solar panels for power in my home." **RISING UP TO CLIMATE CHANGE: STORYTELLING WITH SARIS** then follows three of these American pledge-makers in their daily lives as they turn their words into actions.

The film takes us back to Katakhalī, right after a cyclone, to show the direct effects of climate change and document whether the villagers' preparedness-training and adaptations have helped. The full collection of pledge saris from the US are ultimately returned to Katakhalī, to be worn as everyday garments by the Katakhalī women. The film concludes with a collaborative performance where the women wear the new pledge saris from the U.S. The final performance is also recorded in VR 360 format as a supplement to the feature-length film.

**Film style/vision:** The film will be a combination of verite and art documentary. The story unfolds in multiple layers, with interviews and verite overlaid with stunning images of the island

and water, with the characters going about their daily lives, as well as working on the shimmering transparent saris as they are ~~being~~ printed and ~~drying~~ in the wind. In her visual art and film, Bose uses the sari (a garment comprising six yards of unstitched handwoven cotton) as a symbol and storyboard for women's lives and their resilience. Water is also recurring theme, representing life, climate change, death, and renewal. The STORYTELLING WITH SARIS performances and workshops will bring visual art and community activism into the film.

Unlike the usual "expert"-based films about climate change, this film addresses climate change through the voices of ordinary people. The directors' intent is to illuminate the stories of marginalized poor women, who are rarely seen or heard, as well as to document a community that may disappear. Bose has unique access to the Katakhalī community because of her involvement in the eco-empowerment cooperative for 17 years and her family's roots in the village. Many of the workshops in Washington, D.C. will be women in a shelter in Anacostia, an impoverished section of the city. The initial interviews with the women reveal that many of them had no prior understanding of climate change. The film's focus on personal stories and individual responsibility is used to empower viewers to change their lifestyles and take concrete steps on climate. Now, more than ever, with the U.S. government's indifference to climate change, it is vital to emphasize individual, community, and local action.

The goal is to distribute the film to a wide audience in multiple types of settings and venues: in film festivals and for general release; in art museums, art fairs, and biennials; and also in conferences, universities, and educational settings.

### **Film Team Bios:**

#### **Producer & Director, Monica Jahan Bose**

<http://monicajahanbose.com//>    <http://storytellingwithsaris.com//>

Monica Jahan Bose is a Bangladeshi-American artist, lawyer, and activist whose work spans performance, painting, film, photography, printmaking, and interdisciplinary projects. As an artist originating from Katakhalī, Bangladesh, Monica brings her history into contemporary art, translating these experiences into immersive work. She works in collaboration with rural and urban communities to address issues around gender and climate change. She is the creator of STORYTELLING WITH SARIS, a long-term collaborative art and advocacy project. She directed and produced, with Nandita Ahmed, the 30-minute three-channel video [HER WORDS: STORYTELLING WITH SARIS](#) which has been screened in Bangladesh and the U.S. and shown as part of a video installation at SELECT, Art Basel Miami Beach and many other venues. In December 2015, Bose partnered with the International Centre on Climate Change and Development to create a climate awareness workshop in Katakhalī, Bangladesh.

Her solo projects and installations have been presented at the Brooklyn Museum, the Bangladesh National Museum, Art Asia Miami, the DUMBO Arts Festival, and many other venues. She has a B.A. in Studio Art & Mathematics from Wesleyan University, a diploma in Indian Art from Santiniketan (India), and a *Juris Doctor* from Columbia University School of Law. Alongside her art practice, she practiced and taught environmental and human rights law for many years. Monica has received numerous commissions and awards for her interdisciplinary art work,

including four grants from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities (through the National Endowment for the Arts). In 2016, she was selected for the prestigious Halcyon Art Lab studio residency and fellowship. Monica lives and works in Washington, D.C.

### **Co-Director, Leena Jayaswal**

Leena Jayaswal is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and photographer with deep expertise and interest in issues that intersect race, representation and identity. Her films have been screened in various film festivals around the country. She has experience working on international projects, including *CROSSING FILMS*, a 32-minute documentary of an Indian-American's journey to India after her father's death. *CROSSING LINES* was picked up for national distribution by NETA and has been broadcast on over 100 PBS affiliates across the country. The film has won numerous international and national awards and is currently being distributed by New Day Films. Current projects include co-directing and co-producing a documentary film on inter-racial marriages, *MIXED*, for Documania Films. Jayaswal's photography has been nationally recognized in galleries around the country, including in solo and group shows at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, The Washington Project for the Arts/ Corcoran Gallery of Art, Gandhi Memorial Center, and International Visions Gallery. She is an Associate Professor in the School of Communication at American University and the Head of the Photography Concentration. She received her MFA in Photography (summa cum laude) from the Maryland Institute College of Art and two BA's in Visual Media and Anthropology from American University.

### **Director of Photography and Editor, Shefali Akter Shetu**

Born in Comilla, Bangladesh, Shefali Akter Shetu lives and works in Dhaka, Bangladesh. She founded and manages Aperture, Ltd. in the roles of Managing Director, Photographer, and Documentary Filmmaker. Since 1999, she has edited video and photography for Drik, SARPV, Panos Bangladesh, and Worldview International Foundation. In 2005, Shetu received the Meena Media Award for the best documentary from UNICEF. She was also nominated for the best children's film at Oberhausen Film Festival in 2004 for *ONE LOKMAN*, a documentary about a child street singer. In 2007-2008, she worked in India for DrikIndia through a professional skill sharing exchange program by Fredkorpset. In 2015, she joined the *STORYTELLING WITH SARIS* project team as DP in Katakhal, Bangladesh.

### **Supervising Editor, Nandita Ahmed**

Nandita Ahmed is an artist, designer, and filmmaker. She graduated from Wellesley College with a major in Media Arts and Sciences in 2004. She started her career with various TV stations including WGBH in Boston and DoorDarshan in Ahmedabad and then as a Producer / Editor at Fly Communications, a boutique-sized ad agency based in New York City. At Fly, Ahmed worked on many high-profile accounts including Amazon.com, New York Jets, the French Culinary Institute, and various Condé Nast Publications. Since then, Ahmed has started her own shop, Brand Bean LLC, and has expanded her portfolio into documentary films. She joined the *Storytelling with Saris* project in 2013 and shot, co-directed, and edited the three-channel video *HER WORDS: STORYTELLING WITH SARIS*. Nandita worked as Field Producer and Editor on *A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES: PEACEKEEPERS*, a feature-length documentary about an all-female team of UN Peacekeepers from Bangladesh. The film premiered at

TIFF 2015 and had its NY premiere at DOC NYC. Ahmed was born and raised in Dhaka, Bangladesh and resides in Brooklyn, New York.

**Associate Editor, Kimberley R. Williams**

Kimberley Williams is a freelance filmmaker, environmentalist, and teacher. Based in Washington, D.C., she produces promotional videos and long-form documentary films for non-profits, including One Common Unity, Voices for Biodiversity, and The Transmitting Heritage Project. She has also worked as a Media Arts adjunct professor for both American University and Catholic University of America in Washington DC. Kimberley has an MFA in Film & Media Arts from American University.

**Executive Producer, Preema Nazia Andaleeb**

Based in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Preema is one of Bangladesh's most recognized contemporary artists. She works in painting, video, and performance and has exhibited widely internationally. She is the Director and Creative Editor of Bangladesh Brand Forum and has extensive experience in marketing, media, and corporate sponsorships. In 2014, she received the prestigious Ananya Award for outstanding woman artist in Bangladesh.

**Current Stage of the Film:**

Parts of the film have been shot (in 2013 and 2015-2016 in Bangladesh and some limited footage in the U.S.), but several weeks of shooting remain in Bangladesh, the United States, and Europe. Two further trips to Bangladesh are needed to shoot on location in Katakhal, Bangladesh. One further trip in winter 2017-2018 would be to document further interviews of the villagers as a followup to the December 2015 climate workshops and to engage in additional workshops and performances. The interviews are needed to see what progress has been made in climate adaptation, the strategies the villagers have used to collectively advocate for their rights, and any further impacts of climate change. The next performance in Bangladesh will be recorded in VR (virtual reality) 360 degree format to create an immersive experience for the viewer, which will be integrated as part of the film and may also serve as a stand-alone video installation experience. A second on location shoot in Katakhal, Bangladesh is required to obtain interviews and environmental footage after the next cyclone or severe weather event. So far, the footage we have obtained is during winter season when the weather is perfect and the landscape is dry and non-threatening. (It is very difficult to travel to the island during rainy season or cyclone season, and conditions are not good for taking interviews or doing workshops.) Director of Photography Shefali Akter Shetu resides in Bangladesh and is ready to document the next extreme weather event. In the United States, several future STORYTELLING WITH SARIS climate pledge workshops and performances need to be filmed, and then two or three workshop participants will be interviewed six months later, and again one year later, to see if they have lived up to their promises to reduce carbon footprint. Bose's mother Noorjahan will also be interviewed in English at one of these workshops, to further connect with American viewers.

A location shoot is also needed for an upcoming performances and workshops in Paris, France, the site of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. The Paris workshop is called TWO DEGREES

and strives to create a new people-to-people climate agreement with engagement of youth and students in Paris.

**Timeline / Proposed Schedule:**

March - October 2017: Fundraising, outreach on film, document US workshops and performances; interview US climate pledge participants  
October 2017: Shoot workshops and performance on location in Paris  
November-December 2017: Write script; research; fundraising; preparation for Bangladesh shoot  
December - January 2017: Shoot on location in Bangladesh - 12-14 days  
February - June 2018: interview US climate pledge participants; edit footage and work on rough cut of film; work on trailer; outreach to engage partners and distributors  
Summer/Fall 2017 or 2018: Shoot on location in Bangladesh to capture flooding/cyclone aftermath; 3 to 4 days [timing of this depends on weather and when/if severe storm/cyclone occurs, which is normally between May and November]  
October 2018: Finish rough cut of film, update website, and social media outreach.  
November - December 2018: Organize feedback sessions on rough cut  
January-February 2019: Final edits on film; translations & titles  
March-April 2019: Create original score (Kishon Khan and Lokkhi Terra); sound mix and color correction  
June 2019: Distribution

Work Sample:

RISING UP TO CLIMATE CHANGE: STORYTELLING WITH SARIS

The following is a working sample.

Running time: 16:26

Pending audio mix and color correction.

<https://vimeo.com/209096385>

**password: climate**