

FF2 Media Celebrates the ‘Slumdog Millionaire’ Brouhaha that Ignited International Pushback

On 9/13/08, ‘Slumdog Millionaire’ won the People’s Choice Award at TIFF & on 2/22/09, it won 8 Oscars... but its co-director almost became an “invisible woman.”

BROOKLYN, NY, UNITED STATES, September 13, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In honor of the 20th anniversary of the SWAN project – Support Women Artists Now – on October 2, 2024, SWAN founder [Jan Lisa Huttner](#) looks back at a critical moment for women filmmakers.

Sixteen years ago, on September 13, 2008, a little-known bilingual film with no stars surprised everyone by winning the prestigious People’s Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival. Suddenly, [Slumdog Millionaire](#) (originally expected to be released direct-to-DVD) became a massive juggernaut on the film festival circuit before opening wide in the USA on Christmas Day. Sweeping up award after award all winter long, Slumdog Millionaire eventually left Hollywood’s Kodak Theatre on February 22, 2009 with EIGHT Oscars in hand (including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Original Score).



Loveleen Tandan in Mumbai (2009)
ALAMY ET1G3M

But along with acclaim came controversy. According to IMDb (the authoritative Internet Movie Database), Slumdog Millionaire was co-directed by Danny Boyle (born in Greater Manchester, England) and [Loveleen Tandan](#) (born in New Delhi, India). But even though Boyle himself was extremely supportive of Tandan and eager to applaud her contributions, the more popular the film became, the more its female co-director was consigned to the shadows.

Enter Jan Lisa Huttner. “I was a member of the Chicago Film Critics Association, and Slumdog Millionaire was on the Chicago International Film Festival schedule. So, I was trading messages with the CIFF publicist, and she asked me if I wanted to interview Danny Boyle.”

"My initial reaction (based on all the buzz) was no because my niche was women directors/women screenwriters, but, when I checked IMDb, there she was: Loveleen Tandan. And when I delved deeper, I immediately discovered that she had worked with some of my favorite filmmakers including Sarah Gavron (Brick Lane), Deepa Mehta (Earth) and Mira Nair (Monsoon Wedding and The Namesake). So, I met with Boyle -- who was such a mensch -- and I wrote a glowing review -- because I really loved the film -- and then I moved on."



Loveleen Tandan at an NYC screening of "Slumdog Millionaire." (2009) ALAMY C32MWB

But then came December 11th. When the Golden Globe nominations were announced, and Huttner learned that Danny Boyle (and only Danny Boyle) had been nominated, she was apoplectic. She sent an email message to Chantal Dinnage (the Managing Director of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association) asking for an explanation, and she also sent copies to dozens of women filmmakers and feminist activists.

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If she's co-director during the filmmaking & marketing phases, why isn't she co-nominee when the awards are passed out? How can it be that in the awards phase, Loveleen Tandan is an "invisible woman"?"

Jan Lisa Huttner

Dear Ms. Dinnage,
According to the Internet Movie Database, Danny Boyle is the director of Slumdog Millionaire and Loveleen Tandan is his "co-director."

This morning the Hollywood Foreign Press Association nominated Danny Boyle for a Golden Globe award for his work on Slumdog Millionaire.

Question: If Loveleen Tandan was Danny Boyle's co-director then, why isn't she his co-nominee now?

Most sincerely,
Jan Lisa Huttner

Immediately, women everywhere were up in arms, and soon Huttner's question was picked up by reporters at the Wall Street Journal and Newsweek. Numerous women's organizations including AAUW (the American Association of University Women), WomenArts, the Women's Film Critic Circle, Women & Hollywood, and the Women's Media Center began to press AMPAS (the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences) to nominate Tandan alongside Boyle for the 2009 Best Director Oscar. Eventually reporters from the London Evening Standard to the South China Morning Post weighed in.

Although Tandan herself never entered the fray, always crediting Boyle and denying any structural inequity, producer Christian Colson fanned the flames with his dismissive comments in the Wall Street Journal: "Tandan's 'strange but deserved' title [co-director (India)], was invented over 'a Coca Cola and a cup of tea.'"

Almost every week, as Oscar Night got ever closer, there was another picture of Boyle at another gala winning yet another award: Gold Globe, BAFTA, DGA. Huttner kept pushing: "If she's co-director during the filmmaking and marketing phases, then why isn't she co-nominee when the awards are passed out?" Huttner asked. "How can it be that when we get to the awards phase, Loveleen Tandan is suddenly an 'invisible woman'?" The Women's Media Center posted: "We'll be watching!"

February 22, 2009: When he was called up to the podium to accept the Best Director Oscar, Boyle stood alone, but when Colson was called up to the podium to accept the Best Picture Oscar, suddenly there she was, Loveleen Tandan, in a gorgeous and very visible red and gold sari, a full participant in the Slumdog Millionaire team's triumphant on stage revelry.

Pyrrhic victory? Look what happened next: One year later, at the 2010 Academy Award ceremony, Kathryn Bigelow became the first woman in Oscar history to win in the Best Director category. Coincidence? Huttner says no.

The very first Oscars were presented in 1929. The 81st annual Academy Awards were held in 2009. The 82nd annual Academy Awards were held in 2010. And in all those years, only four women had ever been nominated for the Best Director award, and the first winner was Kathryn Bigelow in 2010. Huttner believes that the "Slumdog Brouhaha" was a clarion call heard all around the world: Support Women Artists Now!

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Jan Lisa Huttner gives Women's History Month talk on Women Filmmakers in Chicago (2009)

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