

# Illuminating the small screen Showcasing Bengali classics

## Subarna Mustafa on contemporary entertainment

ERSHAD KAMOL

BORN in a family with an impressive tradition in acting, Subarna Mustafa has established herself as the leading lady in Bangladeshi TV plays. To date, she remains unparalleled with her unique performance, expressive eyes, beguiling and mysterious smile -- all the attributes of a charismatic actress. Though at present she is not playing a typical 'heroine' on screen, she appears frequently in diverse roles.

What is the difference between the standard of contemporary plays and that of the early 1980s? Subarna has a quick response: "It is not fair to make comparisons as the scenario is totally different. In those days there was only one TV channel. The viewers used to watch TV plays with longer duration, written by eminent writers who had a clear concept of the 'forms' of TV plays. Nowadays, there are several channels, with many playwrights, directors, artists and technical hands. As a result the viewers have great expectations. However the reality is that there are fewer quality productions. The basic problem lies on the emphasis on commercial rather than professional approach. Consequently, floor crossing often occurs in this medium. But, this has a positive side as well, since upcoming artists are doing well especially in the technical aspects. As a result there is diversity in productions."

What is her view on the trend of mega-series? Subarna said, "This is the age of the 'soap operas'. However, the irony is that these 'soaps' are not aired daily rather once or twice a week. As a result one story continues for weeks, which hampers the interest of the audience. However, in daily soap operas in the West the same actors present a new story in each of the episodes. I think the ongoing



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mega-series form is not an ideal entertainment source. Moreover, the surfeit of commercials during the TV plays is another damper. "Another lacuna is that people from different professions are crossing the floor to act in TV plays. The attitude towards acting is, at

best, cavalier. I agree that some of them are doing well while many are substandard. As a result it is difficult to maintain high standards." Subarna thinks that single episode TV plays are in demand rather than "mega-series". "I believe, commercial interest of the direc-

tors, producers, and TV channels lead to several mega-series."

On her message for young performers, she says, "Acting is an inherent talent, which practice can only hone. Analysing the script one should use her/his common sense during the characterisation. And the actor must have different approach for different mediums." This mantra seems to be the secret of Subarna's excellence.

The actress adds, "The problem with the younger generation is that most of them perform in the mega-series. It's unfair to the actors when the playwrights give the script on the shooting spot. Without adequate knowledge the actors are asked to improvise a sequence, which only a master performer can handle."

Though she is not happy with the current local films, Subarna thinks that films should be the ultimate goal for a promising artiste.

The actress is eager to work in films. However, she says, "Given the current scenario of mainstream cinema, I'm not eager to act at all. True, the TV channels are producing a few films. But, I don't think that these films can change the overall scenario."

"All over the world, films are made for the entertainment of the masses. If a movie runs at only one theatre, it doesn't get the widespread exposure. For this reason many movie halls have closed down in our country during the last few years. Films should be big budget productions, which will run nationwide."

On her future plan, Subarna says that she is eager to direct quality commercial movies. She said, "Films can recover their rich tradition. However, the involvement of reputable artistes, directors and technical hands and government monitoring are necessary ingredients."

## Oitijho Boi Utshob at Etcetera



Former Chief Justice Habibur Rahman (C) at the book fair

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Etcetera, the snazzy shop down Gulshan Avenue, is holding *Oitijho Boi Utshob*, a book fair. Publication house, Oitijho has organised the event. In the limelight are five anthologies of classics by the greats of Bengali literature -- *Rabindra Rachanabali*, *Manik Rachanabali*, *Sarat Rachanabali*, *Bibhutibhusan Rachanabali* and *Jibanananda Rachanabali*.

The aim of the display is to "highlight the rich literature of Bangladesh through a special corner of Bengali books," says GS Farouqui, officer, merchandising division of Etcetera, Gulshan.

Another highlight is the 25 percent discount on over 500 Bengali books -- covering the genre of fiction, political writing, health and classics.

Habibur Rahman, former Chief Justice and former head of the Caretaker Government inaugurated the display. Rahman, also a Tagore researcher, was appreciative of Etcetera's endeavour. He pointed out that the special corner for Bengali books was a positive step for both the shop and the Bangladeshi readers.

Similar fortnight-long displays are on at Etcetera's branches in Dhanmondi and Banani.

*Samanvaya* means 'a coming together' in Sanskrit. Recently, two of the most acclaimed Indian classical dancers-choreographers took part in a programme with the title at the Shilpakala Academy recently. Each is a leading exponent of a major tradition in Indian dance: Madhavi Mudgal of Odissi and Alarmel Valli of Bharatnatyam. *Samanvaya* is the dancers' exploration of new dimensions, while maintaining true to their unique dance styles. Seasoned instrumentalists and vocalists accompanied the dancers. Both the dancers have performed extensively in India and overseas.



## An evening of soothing classical music



Sarathi Chatterjee performing at the programme

SALMA A SHAFI

On June 11, after a politically turbulent day in the city, music lovers of Dhaka flocked to Bengal Shilpalya in Dhanmondi to listen to the presentation of Sarathi Chatterjee an exponent of Indian classical music.

Born in a musical family he is one of the foremost young Hindustani classical vocalists of his generation in India. He received his initial training from his father, Professor Arun Kumar Chatterjee, a highly respected and accomplished representative of the *Kirana Gharana*, and from his mother Shefali Chatterjee. Fuelled by the need to continue on his quest for music, Sarathi continues to receive *Talim* from the celebrated and well-known Hindustani classical vocalist, Pandit Rajan-Sajan Mishra of *Benaras Gharana*, specialising in *Khayal Gayaki*.

The author is an urban planner and music enthusiast.



A scene from *It's a Wonderful Life*

At the concert, Sarathi began with raga *Bagesri* in which he presented *Vilambit Khayal* in *ektal*, *Kaun Gata Bhaali* followed by two *bandish* set to *treatal* and ending with a very fast tempo in *Tarana*. Skilfully and intricately he spun the chords of *Bagesri*, mesmerising all with his enchanting voice. This presentation took over almost an hour where his melodious, touching *alap* and *bistar* kept the audience entranced. His composition of complex yet well structured *sargams* and *tans* portrayed the emotional content of the raga and he concluded the presentation with the *Tarana* as a climax of the *Bagesri* experience. *Bagesri* is a well known raga particularly to those who take lessons in classical music and there were many young students among the audience who could grasp the contents.

The High Commission of India, through its Information and Culture wing, provides training to the enthusiastic students of Bangladesh. In this context, free lessons in classical music, dance and yoga, among others are offered throughout the year. Men, women of various ages and backgrounds throng to these centres in Dhanmondi and Gulshan to learn these arts. As Sarathi mentioned in conclusion, there are many eager learners in Bangladesh but there is a dearth of teachers of classical music in the country. By providing such remarkable gurus for our eager learners, the High Commission has made a significant gesture and underscored the rich shared heritage that enriches the subcontinent.

Possessing a powerful and melodious voice, Sarathi's music now, is his own creation, blending elements of the *Benaras Gharana* into the *Kirana Gharana* and his own *Gayaki*. This synthesis of the two great traditions of the *Kirana* and *Benaras Gharanas* has produced a unique musical expression and experience. His traditional treatment of ragas has won acclaim for 'not diluting the purity by even a fraction'. This was reflected in Sarathi Chatterjee's next renderings, where he presented raga *Desh*, a romantic raga with lyrics, which depict the monsoon melody as *Barshan Ayi Kare Badaria*. This was followed by a *teental* composition in raga *Tilak Kamod*. His skill in rendering lighter versions of the classical ragas were also characterised by an unusual depth of expression, purity of tone and presentation.

Sri Prasun Chatterjee accompanied him on the tabla and Md Shakoor on the harmonium.

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## Down memory lane

# The 'rise and fall' of King Kong

SHAHNOOR WAHID

Terror is the name of the beast. Terrifying are the scenes of its fights with prehistoric animals. And terrified is the audience in the dark theatre hall. You are awed at the sight of the beast as it comes crushing the trees under his feet. You are daunted by the imposing height, the rolling eyes, the wide mouth with large teeth and the blood-curdling roar with thumping of the chest. King Kong, the overgrown ape, is the mighty ruler of the Skull Island located in a remote part of the earth where the mist of the primeval past clings to the trees. He tears apart prehistoric animals in the "land that time forgot" with his bare hands with considerable ease. He uproots big trees with a powerful pull and hurls it a quarter mile away. Kong is unstoppable, and he

reigns over the entire domain of the island as the one and the only king.

The effect of the original black and white film (made in 1933) on young viewers like this writer in the '60s can be described in one word -- stupefying. To a student of class seven -- naive and least exposed to the world of special effects -- King Kong was real, the jungle was real, the primitive people of the jungle were real and the animals were real. As far as I remember, it was in Shabistan cinema hall in Old Dhaka where the movie was released for the umpteenth time in the '60s. Like most others, my initial emotion was one of fear, shock and awe at the prowess of the beast. But as the story progressed along, everyone started to feel a little differently about it. Something was amiss somewhere, and there was a strange change that one could discern in Kong after he

finds this Caucasian woman in his jungle.

Was the beast trying to say something to her? The brilliant story now treaded into a difficult area of human and animal relationship, of the desire of a lonesome animal for a mate, of the maltreatment animals received from humans and so on. As a result, Kong could touch a chord in your heart in a strange way. Despite his awesome encounters with his enemies in the jungle, you feel his loneliness, his desire for a company, his frustration at being alone in a hostile world and his anger for the greed of the diminutive creatures called humans when they cage him for display. Very naturally you feel a lump in your throat as the fearless king of the jungle falls from a great height and dies in the concrete jungle made by humans.

The story of this classic adventure was written jointly by Merian C Cooper and Edgar Wallace. (Edgar Wallace however became famous later by writing some cloak and dagger stories). Cooper and Ernest B Schoedsack jointly directed and produced the film. Fay Wray as Ann Darrow became famous as the helpless damsel in the palm of the gigantic, 50-foot Kong.

The screenplay was done by James Ashmore Creelman and Ruth Rose. Struggling with the budget, Cooper and Schoedsack used the jungle set from their film *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932). Surprisingly, this highly entertaining and remarkable film received no Academy Awards nominations. Many experts feel that it would have won in the 'Special Effects' category had there been such a category at that time.

According to the critics the film had many technical innovations for its period such as rear projection, miniature models (about 18 inches in height) and trick photography.

Well, that's all about the film *King Kong* made in 1933. After that many attempts were made to surpass the original film. Director John Guillermin made *King Kong* in 1976 starring Jessica Lange in the famous role of Ann. The film was a super flop. And now we have the latest one being shown in Dhaka. I have heard that it is a much better production. But I am happy with my memory of the original *King Kong*. I believe the original can never be surpassed. So I have decided to get me a CD of the 1933 version and relive the fond memories.

The author is a senior assistant editor of The Daily Star



King Kong then (1933) and now (2005)



## Hope floats on celluloid

### "Wonderful Life" tops 'Inspiring films' list

The story of a despondent businessman, who got a chance to see how ugly the world would be without him, has been proclaimed the most inspiring American movie.

Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*, starring James Stewart, led the American Film Institute's list of inspirational films revealed last Wednesday in the group's annual top-100 TV special that aired on CBS.

"We may not all connect to the story of a fighter from Philadelphia or a singing family in the Austrian Alps," said the TV special's producer, Bob Gazzale, referring to two other films on the list, *Rocky* and *The Sound of Music*.

"But there's no way to get away from the inspiring story of George Bailey. It relates to us all."

To *Kill a Mockingbird*, with Gregory Peck as the upright Southern dad seeking justice for a wrongly accused black man, was No. 2 on the list chosen from 300 nominated films on ballots sent to 1,500 filmmakers, actors, critics and others in Hollywood.

Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, starring Liam Neeson as a German businessman who saves his Jewish workers from extermination by the Nazis, was No. 3.

Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky* was fourth, while another Capra-produced, Bob Gazzale, referring to two other films on the list, *Rocky* and *The Sound of Music*.

Spielberg landed two other films in the top 10, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (No. 6) and *Saving*

*Private Ryan* (No. 10). Rounding out the top 10: *The Grapes of Wrath* (No. 7), *Breaking Away* (No. 8) and *Miracle on 34th Street* (No. 9).

The 1946 classic *It's a Wonderful Life* is the story of a man who dreamed of escaping his dreary town. George Bailey runs his family's penny-ante building and battles the town's miserly overlord.

One Christmas Eve, facing scandal and criminal charges after his uncle misplaces \$8,000, George is driven to attempt suicide, but an angel steps in to show him all the good he's done and what a harsher place the world would be without him.

Source: Internet

## Kotha Chhilo Anyorokom set to air soon

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Written and directed by Chayanika Chowdhury, TV play *Kotha Chhilo Anyorokom* follows the story of a journalist, her past and twists that change the course of her life.

One fine morning a journalist is startled by a headline: "An engineer is killed in a bomb blast". The journalist recalls that she used to be friends with the engineer; in fact they were about to become "more than just friends."

The journalist recalls her university days, when a young man used to be madly in love with her. However, she could only offer him friendship. The young man initially agreed but eventually confessed that he was still deeply in love with her. She asked for some time to think things through while he waited eagerly for her response. But fate had other plans and the young woman discovered she had brain tumour. She had to leave for her treatment in Singapore and a doctor from Dhaka accompanied her.

The flashback ends. The journalist is married to the doctor and she decides to visit the deceased engineer's

wife. Tarin, Mahfuz and Apurbo have donned the major roles in the TV play. Tomalika will be seen doing a cameo. The play will soon be aired on ntv.



Tomalika and Tarin in a scene from the play