

Remembering the mystic bard

Lalon death anniversary observed at Shilpakala Academy



Sufia Monwar (C) renders Lalon songs at the programme

ERSHAD KAMOL

THE first day of the Bangla month *Kartik* marks the death anniversary of mystic bard Fakir Lalon Shah (1774-1890). A commemorative programme was arranged by the Department of Music and Dance of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA) on November 8 (*Kartik 24*).

"This is one of the major annual events of the Department of Dance and Music of BSA," said Sunil Chandra Das, director of the department.

Discussions at the programme focused on the contribution of the great guru. All agreed that Fakir

Lalon Shah's strength lies in his ability to address universal and spiritual issues in uncomplicated terms. And the verses, which the cult calls *Kalams*, are the doctrines of the devotional rites of *Ohedaniat* (the belief that glorifies humanism), which they follow. But, because of its rich literary value, Lalon's verses and philosophy have great impact on Bangla literature, including Rabindranath Tagore.

The speakers further illustrated that Fakir Lalon Shah is unique in that he had blended different school of beliefs, such as Shahajia of Buddhism, Shahajia of Vaishnavism, Sufism of Islam and

several others and thereby interpreted *dehotatta* in his own way. Lalon in many of his verses on *dehotatta* has implicitly given his followers guidelines on going beyond the 'physical existence' to the metaphysical. These verses may not reveal their inner meaning to the common ear and eye but are the base of secret devotional rites, centring on the belief that the human body is the seat of all truths.

One of the two Lalon experts in the programme, Dr Karunamaya Goswami provided an insight on Fakir Lalon Shah and the Baul cult. He said, "Nowadays, preservation of the authentic tunes and lyrics of

Lalon songs has become a much discussed topic, after UNESCO proclaimed the traditional Baul songs of Bangladesh as one of the 43 masterpieces of oral and intangible world heritage. Fakir Lalon Shah is in fact the chief representative of the cult."

To analyse the Baul philosophy, Dr Goswami presented a chronological history of the philosophy since the era of *Charyapada* (8th-12th century Buddhist poems from eastern India). He also analysed how Sufism and Vaishnavism became interwoven with the traditions of Bauls in the subcontinent.

To quote Goswami, "For hundreds of years, followers of Baul schools have interwoven the philosophy and music of the principal gurus. As a result, questions have been raised regarding the authenticity of lyrics, tune and philosophies delivered in Lalon songs. And several intellectuals have interpreted Lalon's biography and philosophies in different ways, which is confusing for the common people. I appreciate BSA's endeavour to preserve the authentic Lalon music by recording Lalon music exponent Fakir Khodabaksh Shah's renditions as well as by arranging long term training conducted by the seasoned fakirs titled 'Lalon Mentor Fellowship Programme'."

Dr Tapan Bagchi and Abul Kalam Shafi Ahmed were the other two speakers in the programme. The programme was presided over by Ashrafur Mosaddek, secretary of BSA.

On the heels of the speech, Sufia Monwar, Monwara Begum Mona, Jayanto Mukharjee and Tapan Majumdar rendered Lalon songs. Singers rendered *Tumi ba kar, Kori mana, Amrito meghero bari, Baro sankote poriya, Milon hobe koto din-ey, Mon bibagi and moner holo*.

In conversation with Arnob Giving timeless songs a new sound

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Of the current breed of talented musicians, Shayan Chowdhury Arnob is a popular name. Over the years this composer/singer has gained recognition for his contribution to fusion music. Songs rendered by him for the band Bangla - *Tui gaan gaa* and *Shona diya bandhalyachi ghar* - gave him nationwide recognition. Simultaneously his compositions of the jingles for commercials and TV serials took him to the limelight.

Arnob earned a name after the release of the first solo album titled *Chai Na Bhabish*, which consists of 13 songs re arranged by him. And in the last five years he has developed a distinctive style of music composition. This November he is going to release his second solo album titled *Hok Kolorab*.

Says Arnob, "All the songs of *Hok Kolorab* are written by Taufiq, my former friend from Shantiniketan. In fact I composed these songs while I was a student. I've polished these songs for my new album. Hopefully the audience will like the songs."

Arnob claims that all of the songs can be labeled as 'fusion'. He fuses folk with blues and classical, using both eastern instruments such as *esraj* as well as western instruments like guitar, keyboards and others in his compositions. The use of *esraj* is one of the unique features in his compositions. To quote him, "Beside learning Rabindra Sangeet and classical music, I learnt *esraj* when I was a school student at Shantiniketan. I'm fascinated by the melody - *meer-gamak* - of the string instrument *esraj* and I frequently use it. I've played the instrument in my compositions for the upcoming album. In fact, I've played all the instruments."

According to Arnob, his sense of 'fusion' music developed at Shantiniketan. Arnob says, "I had the

opportunity to share my views on music with the Bauls living at Shantiniketan. There along with my friends I formed the band named Bangla. Eminent dancer Lubna Marium was a student at Shantiniketan and her daughter Anusheh used to visit her. After getting acquainted, I discovered Anusheh's potential and invited her to perform in India for our band Bangla. After returning to Bangladesh we continued our band with the same title. Buno joined later with the band. I composed all of the songs of the first album of Bangla, except one titled *Ei katha tomader janno*, which was composed by Buno."

Though Arnob received appreciation for jingles, he is least interested in continuing this. As he says, "I've noticed that composing jingles for TV commercials is a waste of one's creative energy. Makers of the commercials and serials keep on pressuring me; to compose a 30 second jingle I have to compromise with the time needed to work on compositions for my own songs."

Arnob completed his graduation and post graduation in graphic design from Shantiniketan. He likes to utilise his background in making films. "My educational background has developed my aesthetic sense, which at present I apply in composing music," says Arnob who is currently working as the CEO of Bengal Music Company.

I had the opportunity to share my views on music with the Bauls living at Shantiniketan



TV Watch

Last episode (3rd round) of Closeup1 '06



Parul



Mohit



Khushbu



Dipa

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

The avidly watched musical talent hunt show titled *Closeup1'06 Tomakei Khujchhe Bangladesh* on ntv will be aired tonight at 9:10.

In the episode Rinku Paul, Rabya Khanam Khushbu and Sharmin Ara

Rashid Era from Dhaka, Tasmira Chowdhury Aurin from Chittagong, Shahriar Rafat from Barisal, Salma Akhter from Kushtia, MR Mohit Khan from Madaripur, Zinnat Ara Parul and Dipa from Rangpur - are on tenterhooks as each hopes to become the new musical sensation.

Among them four aspirants will be selected for the next round. The winners will be selected by the judges and public voting through SMS and internet votes. Viewers can vote their candidate maximum 10 SMS' from each mobile number.



Rinku



Era



Rafat



Salma



Aurin

Movie Watch Christopher Walken to play Ozzy Osbourne

Christopher Walken (who has a history of affiliating himself with musicians - he starred in the Spike Jonze-directed video for Fatboy Slim's *Weapon of Choice* and as Madonna's guardian angel in her *Bad Girl* video) will reportedly be playing Ozzy Osbourne in a cameo appearance in forthcoming film *The Dirt*, based on Motley Crue's legendary autobiography *The Dirt: Confessions of the World's Most Notorious Rock Band*.



It was Crue frontman Vince Neil who broke the news. "How funny is that going to be," Neil allegedly told *ABC News Radio*. Neil also claims that other big names (like Val Kilmer as David Lee Roth) will appear in the film as rockstars. "We're doing big, giant cameos with those people," Neil said.

Ozzy Osbourne (Top) Christopher Walken (L)

Bibhas Chakrabarty in 'Ami Tumi R...'

Noted theatre director of West Bengal, India Bibhas Chakrabarty is the guest artiste of today's episode of *Ami Tumi R...*, a talk show featuring renowned cultural personalities from Bangladesh and West Bengal. The show is to be aired 8:05 pm on Rtv. Bibhas talks about his time and the contemporary theatrical practices in West Bengal. The show is anchored by Nima Rahman and directed by Karobi Mizan.



Errata

In an article, titled "New talk show *Medhabi Bangaair Golpo*", published on November 9 issue of the Culture page, it should have read the personality featured in the last episode (to be aired on November 12) is Asif Azam Siddiqi, (son of Professor Hafiz Siddiqi, vice

chancellor of North South University) a NASA consultant, and Assistant Professor Fordham University, New York. The photo caption should have read "Shupon Roy with Asif Azam Siddiqi" as well. We sincerely regret the error.



Shupon Roy (R) with Asif Azam Siddiqi in the show

In the article titled "Photography festival beings today" published on the same issue, the photo caption should have read "Photographs by Shahidul Alam (L) and Gajaani (R)".

Sound of the Alps Fusion band 'Sonalp' performs at the Swiss Festival



Swiss group Sonalp in a performance

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

To celebrate 35 years of friendship between Bangladesh and Switzerland and to encourage increase in trade between the two countries, a three-day 'Swiss Festival' is being held at Bangladesh China Friend-

ship Conference Centre. Swiss embassy in Dhaka, Switzerland-Bangladesh Business Forum (SBBF) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) jointly organised the event.

The festival was inaugurated on November 8 by Mahbubul Alam,

information adviser to the caretaker government. Dora Rapold, Swiss ambassador to Bangladesh; Ashfaqur Rahman, president of SBBF and Adrian Schlaepfer, assistant director general of SDC were also present at the inauguration.

A range of Swiss companies, Swiss-funded local NGOs and development organisations are participating at the festival that highlights textile products, construction materials, education and banking services.

In the evening a reception and concert was held at the venue. Swiss folk-rock fusion band Sonalp delivered a solo performance. The performance featured two yodellers, one violinist, two percussionists, one bass guitarist and an accordion player; a cowbell and an alpine horn added some extra zing.

Sonalp's music could probably be described as 'new age'; the tunes have that certain 'Enigma' feel. Songs don't contain a flow of words but focus on rhythms accompanied by mastery of vocal vibrations yodellers boast of. Often high-pitched and baritone at times, the melange of sounds is moving.

In between the songs, one of the yodellers shared, "It is incredible to be able to share music of Switzerland in Bangladesh." Audience tapping their feet as the energetic numbers went on, conveyed Sonalp's music certainly had that hold.

The *Daily Star* is the media partner of the festival.

Dance drama 'Hanuman' in Thailand

KAVITA CHARANJI

Resplendent attire, superb sets, perfectly synchronised dancing, these are the elements of *Khon*, a Thai masked dance at Sala Chalermkrung Royal Theatre in Bangkok. This correspondent had the opportunity to catch up with such a spectacular show recently.

Relating the story of Hanuman from the *Ramakien* (the Indian epic *Ramayan*), the dance drama reveals the role of the monkey god in Phra Rama (Rama's) battle against the demon king Tosakanth (Ravana) of Longka (Lanka) city. Homing in on the battle of good against evil, the immortal work staged by the newly-formed Sala Chalermkrung Khon troupe enchants the audience and lives on in the memory long after the curtains have gone down.

The *Khon*, a classical art, was traditionally performed by masked artists and thus needed narrators to project voices for their characters. Even today the narrators have a central-role in *Khon* with only one difference-human and angel characters have shed the masks, while monkey or demon characters still retain their masks on stage.

Ramakien is the most popular script in Thailand. Written by Valmiki, the epic relates an episode of Phra Narai (Narayana) who is reborn to a human so as to save humans and angels from the oppressive



A scene from 'Hanuman'

Tosakanth.

The performance of 'Hanuman the Mighty' begins with the birth of Hanuman, the mischievous monkey, to Sawaha. Hanuman's mischief lands him in trouble. Flying over a garden owned by Phra Uma (Phra Isuan's consort), he carelessly eats and throws fruit. An enraged Phra Uma curses him, reducing his power by half. She says that the curse will be removed only after he meets Phra Ram and strokes Hanuman's back thrice.

Hanuman volunteers to help Phra Ram survey routes to Longka city. Phra Ram asks the white monkey to take a ring and breast cloth to his wife Sida (Sita) who has been abducted by Tosakanth. Giving her the tokens from Phra Ram, he is able to dissuade her from committing suicide and vows to tell Phra Ram to rescue her. Before leaving Longka, he kills Sahaskuman, one of Tosakanth's 1,000 offspring.

Eventually after many twists and turns, Phra Ram shoots an arrow to

kill Tosakanth while Hanuman destroys the demon king's heart and ends his life. Thus good triumphs over evil as Phra Ram wins the battle and sends Hanuman off to rule Nopburi city.

As the wonderful evening drew to a close, one couldn't help but marvel at the timeless appeal of the Indian epic brought to Thailand with a few adaptations. Truly, culture can transcend barriers between countries and smooth over narrow sectarian differences.