



A Truly Nation-sized Festival

By Waheedul Huq

THE sombre Shaheed Dibosh of the pre-independence days of brown colonialism had a very majestic sadness about it — an air of quietude hanging over the whole thing. In the evenings there would be a musical session either at the Curzon Hall or at the Shaheed Minar where the offerings were half dirges and half declarations of pledges and loyalties to the Bangla Bhasa — and not one of them had anything of a lilt anywhere. Shaheed Dibosh was never a festival. Far from it, it was too serious a thing for which young people spent days and months in rehearsals.

That greatly changed with independence which was but a vindication of all that the Shaheed Day stood for. One cannot but remember half in nostalgia and half in horror the midnight carnival around the Shaheed Minar on the 20th night in the first years of freedom. Many felt, perhaps not quite unjustifiably, that the zest and verve that were overtaking the white, suave and sombre air of dejection was the right thing to happen in a nation that has won its way to independence. Thanks to the struggles and sacrifices whose commemoration needed not anymore dark eyes and lugubrious remembrances. While there can be more than two opinions about that, those were the Shaheed Day observances which made the early-hour Shaheed Minar a forbidden territory for women, and even young girls, by their zesty and virile ways.

And then this "mela" thing came to attach itself to the Ekushey. The rounds through the mazzars and past the Shaheed Minar done, one doesn't feel like going back home when it is hardly yet nine. Mela took over the charge for the rest of the day. "Bot" mela came subsequently as a specialised part of the whole thing. As soon as you

were past the flower-spilling Shaheed bedi you automatically stepped into a carnival. It grabbed you, smothered you, ate your whole never asking for your opinion as to whether you liked this to happen to you. And in spite of all this, Ekushey never became a full-scale festival — the way the Puja was for the Hindus and, in its wake, Eid became one for Muslims. On the Ashura day, the 10th of Muharram that is, a mela gathered traditionally at "Kerbala" — a make-believe thing exactly in the fashion of the Duldul-Hossain's legendary steed. But the "Kerbala" (some place near the Azimpur graveyard) mela served only to underline what Ashura was about — a day of "matam" — weeping over the tragedy of the true Kerbala in Iraq.

The bare fact that stared us all in a very disconcerting way was that the Bengalees were one people — in spite of religious, political and even cultural diversities — a people that could be divided into two or more, indeed many more states, yet not quite divided — had no festival for the whole people. A festival that embraced all, transcended communal barriers. That much secular. And festivals do not fall from the sky. They have to grow over centuries and come right out of the pages of history — and of cultural anthropology.

Bengalees were historically a people given to 13 festivals crowding a 12-month year. Some of them were related directly to feudal relations and were lost with the end of that system in both its social and economic aspects. Others were too much soaked in communal sentiments and practices, and had naturally to lose ground with the waning of the communal worldviews and strong loyalties. The best of this genre was the Chaitra

Sankanti. The loss of this festival coming down from a hoary past — is a positive loss to the whole Bengalee, in spite of its very pronounced Shaivite and Tantric associations.

If Bengalees needed a state of their own, then they also needed as badly a festival of all their nation. Independence Day of March 26 and Victory Day of December 16 fell short of answering to the order if only because they were sponsored and run the whole hog from up above. And Bengalees are a people never in love with that kind of tamasha.

Pahela Baishakh fitted the bill perfectly. It was formerly a day for the trading class who opened new ledgers and cash registers on the day. But as the Bengalee Muslim literati went on a voyage of rediscovering their roots — and Umar has so aptly termed it as the "homecoming back from the wilderness" — started celebrating a Bengali New Year's Day in the confines of their drawing rooms.

Making a national festival of Pahela Baishakh was however altogether a different story. A story monopolised by Chhayanaut — the harbinger of Bengali nationalism on the cultural and artistic place, and a catalytic agent for the resurgence of Bengali art songs and seasonal art festivals. Their first institution-making morning congregation in 1966 strangely, interestingly and very patently unintendedly coincided with the Six-Point Programme. If the Programme and the political leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his Awami League fashioned from very amorphous and very remotely tangible historico-cultural material a War of Liberation and the resultant independent state for the Bengalee people — the nationalistic cultural resurgence,

especially Pahela Baishakh, as sculpted and enlivened by Chhayanaut, played no mean role either.

By the 25th year of that first musical opening of the year at the Ramna "Batamul", Pahela Baishakh has matured into universal acceptance as the biggest secular all-people festival of the Bengalee people. Many far-sighted people, some of them from the initiators of the Pahela Baishakh festival, thought of supplementing this with a "good season" festival which could be easily done by a revival of the centuries-old "Nabanna" or harvest festival. But it didn't somehow click.

One hopes that it does — and there be at least some more truly national festivals for the Bengalee people. It must at all times be borne in mind that Pahela Baishakh as a national festival is a development of the people of Bangladesh and that it was primarily an expression of Muslim Bengalees celebrating their first appreciation of their roots in many centuries.

All My Songs

Gazi Sadeq

All my songs are for you and my thoughts all day long are with you

But we are destined never to be close as lovers ever should be

I do not even know if you love me as I love you

But it's true all my songs are for you.

A Change of Weather for the Heart

Arjumand Ara Ranu

*When two rosy palms become one
Happiness becomes a white dove.*

*In growing warmth an eternal bond
The soft fingers locked in love,
Slowly the body is covered
In a canopy of longing and lust.*

*Does a body caress another?
Or is it the soul?*

*In the rosy forest of Hearts
There is unprecedented turmoil,
A restless wind blows from the south
Its fragrance hung on the air.*

*Krishna dances in the eyes of Radhika
Radha is in Krishna's eyes,
In deep sorrow a life is reborn
What a celestial game it is.*

Translation: Helal uddin Ahmed.



Welcome, 1398: Saying it with a smile.

— Photo: Mohsin

Familiar Landscape

by Abu Zafar Obaidullah

(From the book "My Time", Published by Anindya Prakashoni)

Translated by Afsan Chowdhury

There is a tree next to my house tall and handsome, and with the branches and leaves spread out it is almost a forest, like a green lake in high noon. The neighbour mine is generous and kind, insects and birds, fungus and stars have all found shelter with him, but he is very partial towards birds.

When the dark deep his anxiety swells, a bird has probably not returned home. He knows that certain birds once they fly away never return, just as leaves drifting away always disappear. But eggs like fireflies get easily wet.

Darkness arrives with the warmth of stars, chiral leaves can not overcome the clouds. The tree next to my house nowadays is forever sad.

Birds fly Fearing their address in the sky. The generous tree with both hands guards the birds, he way the rivers hold the child in own lap. But birds love colours and song-birds adore music. When fruit seeds and the green fade and go dry, or if songs suddenly die the a bode of birds break up. All birds return, all rivers do. But there are some birds who leave no forwarding address behind when they leave and depart. River is a bird simile the rippling wings of trees river gulls float like the crest of waves. Flowers blossom in thousand shades in the forest

with pollen on their wings fish and birds frolic on. Birds dry dew drops in their eyes, water and earth burn emptying the sad arms of the tree, birds break their homes birds fly away. All birds return home all trees do, there are some birds who when they fly far, never return back. Skies darken Clouds collect, mother of birds wait with beaks full of food, the soul of fishes shiver. There are some birds who with two hands part the darkness, beyond the clouds there is a castle of light. All birds return home all rivers do. The waterfall of birds cool the sky.

make trees entralling. There are some birds, when they go beyond the clouds leave no address behind. When birds lose their home they never return.

The familiar landscape is far too forlorn, those I knew well met and talked to everyday, they are mostly dead. Some were of course old, besides, for the last few years, the cycle of summer is incensed. The brawny tree that was next to my house, did it fall to any deathly fever? Neighbours, friends, relatives, can say nothing. When I enquire they turn their face away, and avoid me like a carrier of plague. I thought I would ask the birds because birds are free and truthful, but when birds fly away they really do. Except for a few crows there is nothing left, no birds no trees: the familiar landscape is far too forlorn.

সেবাই যমুনা

- ▶ শিল্প-কারখানা, কল-কবজা, মোটর ইঞ্জিন এর আয়ু বাড়ান
- ▶ ক্ষয়রোধে ব্যবহার করুন ক্যাঙ্কল ব্রাণ্ডের লুব্রিকেটিং অয়েল ও গ্রীজ
- ▶ আপনার সেবায় নিয়োজিত সারাদেশে "যমুনা অয়েল" এর ৩০৫ জন পরিবেশক
- ও
- ▶ ১৫১ টি পেটোল পাম্প



যমুনা অয়েল কোম্পানী লিঃ

(বাংলাদেশ পেট্রোলিয়াম কর্পোরেশনের সহযোগী প্রতিষ্ঠান)

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