

# For Cultural Rejuvenation



Pahela Baishakh, as a kind of movement, never even as an attempt on the sideline, tried to revive or propagate the Bengali calendar. Patently because it was national rejuvenation rather than going back to a particular calendar that had been set as the aim.

For subsequent coup leaders turned champions of democracy to adopt in their own good time — the campaign threw into the open all sacred bulls of Pakistan. The situation further made tenuous by Khwaja Shahabuddin, Ayub's information minister, banning Rabindra Sangeet on radio and TV. Tagore's melodies of immaculate beauty became a national cause. Cultural resistance, built up over the years with grit and rare steadfastness, found a focal point in the promotion and propagation of Tagore Song. Shahabuddin's foolishness landed East Pakistan on the lap of Chhayanaut which had been championing Tagore songs from day one of its existence.

Pakistan's miserably failure to involve the eastern wing in its unfortunate war with India, wilderness of an identity quandary, started on the way called so aptly by Badruddin Umar as the homecoming of the Bengalee Muslim. In answering positively and convincingly to the questions first raised by Ekushey, Pahela Baishakh also answered as to what our people were turning pro to. People were very positively turning to their own history and culture and identity — all of which lay under a mile-deep debris of communal disinformation campaign mounted by the Pakistan movement. Looked at this way, Pahela was but the cultural extension of the Ekushey and it clicked pat with the mainstream of the overall nationalist resurgence in the Bengalee people.

There were a number of other significant aspects to the other barriers. A warmth is generated among a multitude of people, something quite unknown so far. These were the factors of the success of the Pahela Baishakh before the break-up of Pakistan. The musical function at the *bautomool*, success in contributing to the disenchantment with that monstrosity of a state through putting forth very positive values of one's culture and music and history and calendar, it must have taken on newer relevances in the post-liberation independent Bangladesh. For now there was nothing to pull away people from. While the first achievement continued to yield good fresh results — compare the state of Ekushey observance to the Pahela Baishakh celebration — Pahela

etc. are being disseminated without as much as a mild protest. The electronic and the print media are no stragglers in the nefarious race. Unless forces better designed to engage this problem come into play, the only lonely soldier to man the breach will be Pahela Baishakh — the only secular and nation-embracing big cultural event. This has devolved on the festival a great responsibility as much as it has given it a new meaning — replete with undying glory.

# Festivals We Had and We Need to Have



**by Nilratan Halder**  
 ones have evolved and remind. One surely needs leisure and recreation. But then it is no guarantee that the more leisure you have, the more creative you become. It depends on the depth of mind and its interaction with nature. The climate and the surrounding nature of a particular place or land decide to a certain extent the shape of festivals.

Let us frankly admit that most of our *parbans* and festivals have failed to embrace people across the religious divides with the same amount of warmth and enthusiasm that went into the making of the spring drama festival in Greece or the uninhibited dance festival in ancient India. Yet we are lucky to retain a few from the past with almost a secular nature and even are inventing one or two having nothing to do with any religious or ritualistic performance.

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## by Waheedul Haque

opened newer wounds on that miserable state's body politic. Sheikh Mujib's Six Points found a fertile and ready ground.

That was the moment to strike the nail on its head, and Chhayanaut didn't miss to make the most of it. It launched the Pahela Baishakh festival which caught on the nationalistic fervour of the people and became a galling of the middle class in no time. What did the Chhayanaut nationalism of the Pahela, Baishakh have in it to make people accept it so quickly and with so much enthusiasm? The situation then was rife with rejection of Pakistan for all the reasons under the sun. But all of these were negative. If the Bengalees were becoming anti-Pakistan at a very fast pace, what were they growing pro to? So far nothing tangible could be produced for an answer. Now here was something for a very good answer. And the source of that answer could easily be tracked to Ekushey, the start of the Great Language Movement. It was in 1952 that the Bengalees asserted in a big way that they had a language for whose honour and rightful place in the scheme of things specially of the Pakistani state they were prepared to die. The exigencies of the movement to succeed politically had blurred certain important and basic question that the Ekushey had raised. A language was not revealed one good day. It evolved in culture over a long time, historical and even prehistoric. Bengalees had an ancient culture — and it was neither born nor imported from abroad one day in the twelfth century when Ikhtiaruddin bin-Bakhtiar Khilji took Lakshnaut — the capital of Lakshman Sen. These questions largely about the identity of the Bengalees were raised but not pursued with any seriousness — political action wholly took over the attention of the people. With the successful rehabilitation of Rabindranath in the mind of the people and also the success of the festivals celebrating the seasons — Bengalees, specially Muslims whose it was the portion to roam about the

why of Pahela Baishakh's success. One, it called out people to nature, something Rabindranath did throughout the whole of his life, but would not get a meaningful social response. Two, Pahela Baishakh called out people to music — the best in the Bengal tradition and far from being merely entertaining. Most of the vast crowds of audience had hardly had any experience of live music. Now, on this Pahela Baishakh dawn, music was reverberating among the elements — coming to the individual from all directions and literally drowning him. This was music ordinarily not heard, music that was very evidently humanizing nature — saturating the light and the sky and the water and greens around with human sentiments and beautifying all of them with man-made forms. Music, architecturally excellent and presented so in the wide open, takes over the power of the elements and surpasses them in their hold on the human mind. Three, Pahela Baishakh calls out people to an almost Eid-like vast congregation but of peace and beauty, bon homie transcending communal and

Baishakh's paramount potential in contributing to the national integration of the people came into play only after the War of Liberation.

The communal divide that continues to rule society and politics with an ever increasing grip is thoroughly incapacitating the nation to come into its own and build a national will and an appreciation of the true national interest. Ekushey that first transcended the Pakistan-promoted social chasm is now a spent force specially after being eaten up in big portions by that pseudo-cultural event, the *bol-mela*. The truly nationalistic politics of Awami League, the architect of independence, has been dangerously dissipated by its avowed antithesis mainly through the latter's taking up the same name of nationalism, albeit of the Bangladeshi variety. Unless AL is able to re-assert its ideas on the essence of our nationhood — something embracing all in the land and not a mindless exercise in exclusion — the integration that we need as the first factor for our survival will not be there. In education too, the divisive attitudes of communal super-

The idea is cultural rejuvenation, to bring man closer to culture and culture closer to man at a time when a bankrupt Pakistan had left us with a wedge driven between the two entities that have been but one indivisible whole since man walked on two feet and used a stick to get things done. What Pakistan did to us, the industrialised civilisation of the capitalist West, flying on the wings of consumerism, is doing to the entire global family. Pahela Baishakh is a mighty stand to fight both back.



Chhayanaut Celebration: Music and Mirth



# Towards Culture-friendly Development

Development models and paradigms which do not have the cultural content and form rooted in, and imbued with, the aspirations and actions of the common, ordinary people can only lead to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, destruction of local production machines, and unremittingly hopeless dependence on foreign aid for even day-to-day survival, argues here one of the leading development economists of the country who, also, stresses the need for pursuing a sovereign approach to development through accommodating space for people's culture.

World who had access to the Western knowledge system and also the privilege of being close to the power-network were quickly coopted for propagating a development paradigm which also suited them.

The timing was also very carefully calculated. The Second World War left the people of the Third World with an unprecedented dream for freedom. The elite were surely efficient enough to convince the masses that economic growth based on Western technology and wisdom was the only answer to their problem of 'underdevelopment'. Easily the elite were able to win over the collective consciousness of these countries and instilled in the mind of the masses a dream for development at any cost. If necessary by even destroying their stock of resources, natural and others. Hence, by the end of the 1950s, a generalised developmentalist conscience had already taken a deep root in the mind of the people, and even the ordinary people who survived for centuries on their

own creativity and cultural strength, to surrender their sovereignty of approach to such all to the imposed ready-made Western recipe. As a result, a confusing mixture of cultures pervaded our educational system, media and finally the public mind. People

The other part has been the craving for a similar consumption-pattern without the supporting purchasing power. In a sense, both parts of society have become suspended in the process. All this has happened in a period fraught with profound social discord. The recent fall

people have no access to the modern means and at the same time, have abandoned the age-old solutions to the problems which their forefathers had been so zealously preserving. Instead, the local resources, both physical and social, have been channelled into implementing unfamiliar development projects mostly designed by foreign consultants and aided by the local elite. The end-result has been development disasters like 'Beel Dakatia', the fallout of a mega embankment project. In the process, even though people physically live in Bangladesh, they have indeed become 'cultural immigrants'. They have been forced to forget their own ways of living and dreaming, but have not been provided with alternative means and dreams. The majority of our people have been thus made 'immigrants' without ever setting foot on foreign soil. The lavish consumption-pattern and acute social segregation or individualism which are the basic characteristics of that brand of developmentalism propagated by the modern

# The Real Heroes

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 'Bengali Renaissance', the beginning of which is conventionally traced back to the and keep living, exhibiting unusual *tour de force* which can further be explored and promoted to break the century-old traps of poverty and exploitation.

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The Pahela Baishakh festival, as it has arrived today marking the beginning of a new Bengali year, is not just a routine ritual invested with songs and dances, it is also an occasion which can take us to that unheeded area of our political and cultural history where our people are the real heroes. The fact that our common, ordinary people are the real heroes is well borne out by the history of our

nineteenth century — was not only a middle-class phenomenon, but it was largely shaped and animated by the creative possibilities and participation of the subaltern classes, whose protests and movements, from time to time, yielded a progressive social dialectic in favour of freedom, free thinking, secularism, democracy, and above all, in favour of a life that celebrates itself even in the face of death. Through various trials and triumphs, it is our people who still remain progressive, creative, tolerant, responsible, democratic, non-communal, secular, and even revolutionary, and what is usually termed poverty so glibly attributed to our common people is only an economic phenomenon perpetuated not by the people themselves, but by the bankruptcy and poverty of the ruling elite. While our people always try to move forward, most of our middle-class political leaders and cultural gurus tend to move backward or wallow in the slough of crises!

The celebration of the Pahela Baishakh is actually a celebration of life, and to celebrate life is to celebrate its underlying strength and possibilities which our people can only claim to have. Middle-class festivities with reiterated patterns and postures today look like routine responses, but the fact that the people 'not only survive but prevail', to use Faulkner's words, points to an ardent celebration of life in this part of the world, which perhaps cannot be found elsewhere. In a country where spectacles of death and dying, damage and destruction may fairly be scheduled into its annual routine, where the patterned succession of floods-drought-tornado-earthquake keeps the Faulknerian question in view: "when will I be blown up?" and where hunger, poverty, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy including political deceptions and crises lead most of our people to the pronouncement of "I am no more than an animal that someone has stabbed in the stomach", our people still fare forward, and give us (the middle-class) what we eat, utilize, exploit, and finally spoil.

What is really unfortunate is that despite such enormous possibilities and strengths of our people, they have not yet been adequately galvanized into a continuous and integrated cultural revolution that can ensure none's but people's power in all spheres. On this day of Pahela Baishakh, let us all look forward to such a moment and a movement, and sing — *esho he Baishakh, esho, esho...*

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