

travel

A Visit to Shakespeare's Globe Theatre

by Arifa Rahman

I had seen the men working on the bank near Southwark Bridge, had ventured a couple of times down the river walkway to see the unique recreation of the most famous playhouse in the world, the Globe Theatre, as it came into shape. I had read spellbinding accounts of the extensive and arduous research that had gone into the reformulation of the site on the south bank, just yards from its original position, in order to bring England's most important theatrical heritage to life.

I had even bought one or two of the highly imaginative memorabilia that only the British are capable of producing — my favourite, a card depicting a fairly common black and white sketch of Shakespeare's face found in most of his books, made uncommon by the addition of a startlingly yellow building-site protective helmet on the head, and depicting the following message in old English script:

Unparallel'd Fantastical
The Most Astonishing SITE in
LONDON

Come watch us rebuild
SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE THEATRE
from green oak,

water reeds, sand, lime putty and
goat hair.

10 till 5 o'clock daily, Bankside,
Southwark, SE1.

And resolve to be amaz'd.

And AMAZING is the word for the
Globe Theatre, the centrepiece of the
International Shakespeare Globe
Centre, an educational, entertainment
and cultural complex. It took twenty-
five years of long arduous struggle for
the renaissance of the Globe — thanks
to the vision and inspiring determination
of, among others, the late actor-director
Sam Wanamaker. First built on
Bankside, London in 1599, it was the
theatre for which Shakespeare wrote

his greatest plays. In 1613, it was rebuilt
after a fire and continued to flourish
until 1642, when all theatres were
forced to close. Now more than 350
years later it had been reconstructed
faithfully combining all available docu-
mentary and archeological evidence of
the period — a majestic tribute to
Elizabethan architecture, traditional
materials and craft skills.

"A many-sided round place" as the
Globe's artistic director calls it, it is a
circular building facing the river with a
distinctive lime-white facade, brown
timber supports and grey reed-thatched
roof. Made completely of wood and open
to the sky in the centre, it is enclosed by
an inner periphery containing tiers of
seats forming the upper, middle and
lower galleries under a protective sloping
roof. The open-air centre is the yard
where the "groundlings" stand just as
they did in Shakespeare's time eating,
drinking, milling around, even ex-
changing pleasantries with the players.
The raised stage made of ornate wood
curiously with Doric columns, is open
on three sides allowing a view from
practically all around. And there is an
overhead balcony at the back of the
stage to house the musicians who play
authentic period instruments and pro-
vide the background music. Curtains
are not raised or lowered and every-
thing is in full view except the rear from
which the actors emerge and exit.

I had been extremely disappointed to
have missed the first performance at
the Globe, a one-off event (before the
start of the formal opening season from
May this year) where tickets at least for
the "groundlings" had been charged at
the Elizabethan rate, something like a
penny each! Out of this world you may
say especially if you are aware of the
sky-high prices of theatre tickets today.
An interesting feature of this perfor-
mance was that one of the actors broke
his leg and had to be hospitalized!



Memorable indeed.

Therefore imagine my euphoria the
evening I finally made it to the Globe. Of
course I chose to be a "groundling" — not
just because it was cheaper (to be honest
that was one reason); I also wanted to
savour that unique experience since the
organizers claimed they wished to cre-
ate a completely Elizabethan ambience.
Although it had been a sizzling summer,
that particular day turned out to be wet.
It drizzled all through and aware of the
fact that I was among the "lowly in the
pit" at the mercy of the elements, I rang
the Globe. What do you do in case of bad
weather? They were surprised — the per-
formance goes on of course. Can you use
umbrellas? Sorry, I inspected all my
rainwear. Most of it was winter stuff, at
least the ones with headgear. I fished

out a thin plastic waterproof cover all
with Niagara Falls blazoned across the
back. I couldn't wear that — people
would think I was showing off my visit
to Canada. And anyway, I hadn't been
there — it was my husband who had.
Finally, I decided on a long summer
raincoat, heavy but comfortable walk-
ing shoes and an unmatching water-
proof hood detached from my winter
jacket. I looked a perfect sight — but
anything for Shakespeare and the
Globe! And a lucky thing it was too for
during the entire performance the rain
didn't let up for a second.

The play was *A Winter's Tale*, that
wonderful genre of the romance mixed
with the most realistic psychology of
the tragedies. Interestingly enough, this
particular play was, in spite of my lit-

erature background, a work I was com-
pletely unfamiliar with. I had seen sev-
eral performances of Shakespeare by
prestigious theatre companies since my
student days — at home, in London, at
Stratford-on-Avon. But they had al-
ways been the well-known plays like
Hamlet, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* and
so on — plays I had read or at least knew
about. For the first time, I was experi-
encing Shakespeare raw. I had misgiv-
ings that some of the Elizabethan lingo
would prove too daunting.

Nevertheless, with an almost divine
sense of history I approached the place.
The earliest known performance of *A
Winter's Tale* was at the original Globe
Theatre on 15 May 1611 and here I was
exactly 386 years, 2 months and 16 days
later, about to watch a similar perfor-
mance on the same site in the reincar-
nated Globe! Clutching my Yard Entry
ticket I made my way through the
Grounding Gates into a melee of confu-
sion. People were milling around, nu-
merous umbrellas were up and the cen-
tre pit was almost empty as people stood
around on steps and under the gate
arches. Oh dear, I thought, this doesn't
look very promising. Then the players
started to emerge bringing out curios
and creating a marketplace atmo-
sphere. Slowly we started to take notice,
the stewards moved about inconspicu-
ously asking umbrellas to be put away
and people to move down from the steps
and as the raucous opening scene began
(that timeless tradition of the theatre to
bring a restless audience to attention), I
was gradually transported into an en-
chanting world of the exotic and the
magical through an exquisite blend of
the human and the divine.

Previously I had had experiences of
all sorts of hypes in theatres either
technically contrived or aimed to pro-
voke, such as *Hamlet* on a stage setting
that had a skewed perspective and made
you feel that you were sliding off one

end or the *Midsummer Night's* lovers
scampering around the woods in jeans
and T-shirts. But the Globe, true to six-
teenth century tradition, offered no
gimmicks; only a superb set of players
at the hands of a brilliantly perceptive
director. The props were simple, the cos-
tumes utterly low-key, the players
barefoot treading copious amounts of
rust-coloured grit strewn on the stage —
all these a stark contrast to the exila-
rating gusto of the performers. Obvi-
ously the director was not afraid to
push the emotions to their limits (merci-
fully without treading on melodrama),
be it love, jealousy, suspicion, grief,
guilt, remorse or just the sheer joy
of being young and alive. Whatever the
feeling, it welled up from the stage in
impassioned waves that ignited
Shakespeare's poetry with an incandes-
cent life. Truly I can humbly claim to
have understood each and every
Elizabethan word that descended on me
and that is no credit to my knowledge of
Shakespeare or the English language
but to the performers who breathed such
infectious life into each utterance. The
fact that I stood at such close proximity
(I had pushed myself right next to the
stage) was a great help too. I was com-
pletely caught up in the action and I'm
not ashamed to say that I even shed a
tear or two. Also in the grounding tra-
dition I managed to hurl an obscenity at
the jealous Leontes who flung back at
me "Nay, thou darest not speak thus". It
was absolutely delightful!

And when after three and a half
hours and two short breaks (the end of
each heralded by a steward clanging an
old bell), the performance came to a
close, I woke up as from a trance. My
feet didn't ache. I didn't catch a chill
through standing in the incessant rain.
Nothing mattered except that it had
been one of the most brilliant, most
exciting, most exhilarating experiences
of my life.

column: parisien portrait

Homage to Perfume

by Raana Haider

ARMANI, Balenciaga, Chanel, Dior, Givenchy, Hanae Mori, Issey Miyake, Nina Ricci, Ted Lapidus, Yves St. Laurent... No, the above names are not alphabetical entries from an anthology of haute couture fashion houses in France. Although, they would be featured in any Who's Who of the French Fashion Forum. Armani... Yves St. Laurent are names arranged alphabetically on the shelf headings of Sephora, "an immense new location dedicated to the universe of perfume with high-tech touches like a sensory auditorium and an internet connection" reports Where: Paris' an up-to-date guide on the best of La Vie Parisienne.

Sephora opened in 1996 on Champs Elysee, the most celebrated avenue in Paris, close to another exclusive perfume house, Guerlain. While the

Guerlain outlet retains every cardinal aspect of classicism — subtle elegance and understated refinement, par excellence — from its architectural exterior to its restrained interior — Sephora is the antithesis in its interior. The use of black laminated surfaces, plenty of glass and chrome creates a cool, ultra-modern minimalist interior. Sephora is an ultimate sensory and visual experiment and highly successful at that, judging from the crowds; men and women, young and old, French and foreigners. From the word go — from the entrance to the deep far-end of the wide expanse tunnel-like interior, it is a sensory delight of seeing, feeling and smelling perfume, and falling iron will power to resist temptation, succumbing to some purchase. The perfume pleasure-dome is highly successful in breaking down any reservations one may have entered with, judging from the queues at the payment counters.

Human frailty is thy name.

From the doorstep, all along the left and right walls are shelves and shelves of perfumes, eau de cologne, eau de toilette — all beckoning. It starts alphabetically with the perfume house name, for example, Chanel. Under the Chanel heading are all the sensory delights ever created by Chanel: Chanel No. 5, Chanel No. 19 etc. and Allure, the latest on the market. The shelf stocking the perennially favourite French classic perfume, Chanel No. 5 notes that it was created in 1921 and its composition is rose, jasmine and ylang and the price of the particular-sized bottle. It also details the Style of the perfume; so that Style for Chanel No. 5 describes it as eternally feminine! Allure was created in 1996 and it is made up of cedar, jasmine, vanilla and mandarine. Allure's Style is: unidentifiable but irresistible!

Close to Chanel is Dior and there you find Miss Dior, Diorissimo etc. and its

recent creation, Dolce Vita created in 1995. Its composition includes apricot, vanilla and lilly. Dolce Vita's Style is: a sensual perfume which gives happiness and the joy of living. And so it goes on through the alphabet. Such is the uniqueness of every Style that it is universally irresistible! A brilliant marketing ploy. As if it is not enough to see and read about perfume at Sephora, and that too, as far as the eye can see; you can indulge yourself in touching and smelling it. Each and every perfume has a tester bottle. All along the shelves there are jars with strips of paper on which is printed Spray Here and Name — One is to spray the perfume of the strip and then note the name of the perfume. Such is the enticement to the senses, that it is a pleasure; and that too one is encouraged, to go from shelf to shelf methodically spraying oneself (but after a whole — spraying the strips of paper is advisable) and writing on

each strip the particular name of the sprayed-on perfume. A veritable venue for some serious research on the power of perfume.

There is no gender disparity in sensory delights. The men's range is equally diverse and it occupies almost the entire left side of the hall and operates on the same alphabetical principle and self-indulgence. There are very large numbers of men in the crowds testing the products and succumbing as well. Marketing whizz-kids also know that women are major buyers of men's after-shave lotions and other toiletries. For the connoisseur and well-heeled person, pricey coffee-table books on the history of perfume, aromatherapy, perfume through the ages perfume and fashion...are also available.

By now walking in a cloud of spray of scents, one can then further indulge oneself in sampling each and every kind of make-up which exists; lipstick,

blush, eyeliner, mascara, foundation... by international cosmetic companies — L'Oréal, Revlon, Clarins, Helena Rubenstein...and creams and lotions to lighten or darken, to clear or hide, to flatten or puff-up, to loosen or tighten the skin. It is all there. Seek and ye shall find.

Having free rein and accessibility at the fantasyland of hedonistic pleasures, one leaves Sephora in a sweet-smelling cocoon of perfume and a good deal of French Franks lighter but feeling quite self-satisfied. I saw a young man spray his paperback book and coolly and casually walk into the warm sunshine of Champs Elysee. I plan to return with a worthy tome-maybe, War and Peace or A Suitable Boy — a book which will do justice to Sephora.

Sephora, a stunning show-piece of a major French export product, perfume has been created with true Gallic glamour, flair and savoir-faire.

essay

Some Aspects of Nationalism of the Bengalis — V

by Serajul Islam Choudhury

MOTHER-worship was typical of agricultural Bengal. As cultural historians have noted, the local pantheon had more goddesses than gods. The Aryan Shiva became in Bengal a homely peasant and an erring husband, shedding his terrifying form of the destroyer; and the goddesses Durga and Kali became the daughter and the mother, giving affection and protection. Similarly, the Islam that came to the doors of the Bengal peasantry was not that of the fierce conqueror but that of the gentle Sufis and Pirs, working as guides and leaders rather than as makers of proselytes. The Hindu and the Muslim peasantry — the Paran Mandals and the Rahim Shekhs — have lived together, oblivious of the communal differences historians like Ramesh Chandra Majumdar have been careful to note. Communalism, the vile force that cut across Bengali nationalism, was a creation of middle class rivalry for jobs and political power, and did not exist before the British came and created a colonial state, linking Bengal with the rest of India as well the empire.

Fertility in women, as in land, has been a cherished quality to the Bengalis. The population growth in Bengal has been phenomenal, outstripping that of the rest of India. The census reports between 1872 and 1941 show that whereas the Indian growth was at the rate of 0.31 per cent a year, that of Bengal has been 1.22 per cent, more than three times as much. And within Bengal itself East Bengal has been more productive than West Bengal — the respective figures being 1.37 and 1.30. Estimates show that whilst in 1793 as much as 60% of Bengal was uncultivated, by 1900 Bengal was the most densely-populated cultivated area in India. What is significant is that it is only recently that population growth is being viewed with concern. And it was not unusual for the Bengalis to consider the land more valuable than the people. Nation sometimes meant the country. But professions of respect and love have often been a cover for much abuse, including rape, of women. In early Bengal the women used to be idealized. Nihar Ranjan notes that women themselves desired to be as helpful as Lakshmi and as tolerant as the earth. She thought that her fulfillment lay in joining her husband in his work and in being his

shadow. That this idealism was an imposition need not be doubted. The truth of the matter was that, her position in society was not much superior to that of the Sudra. She was there to serve. The so-called self immolation of wives, early marriage and upper-class men taking up several wives, are all in keeping with her social station in life. Bhusuku's statement in *Charijyapade* to the effect that he became Bengali marrying a *Chandali* (an outcaste) is not wide of the mark.

Since then, there has been progress in several respects, but the woman's position has not fundamentally altered. When Nirad Chaudhuri calls his book on women *Bangalir Jiboney Ramani* (The pleasure giving partner in the life of the Bengali), (1967), he displays an attitude shared by many in the educated Bengali society, who, despite their faith in democracy and all that see women as providers of satisfaction to men. Nirad Chaudhuri, we recall, strongly disapproved of the Chittagong Armoury Raid, but what he found particularly sinister, as he calls it, was the women's coming into the movement and becoming even more 'hysterical' than men. Chaudhuri's conservatism with regard to

women had also manifested itself when, in an essay, he called Bengali girls wearing North Indian dress in Delhi their submission to 'Muslim clothes'.

Mir Mosharraf Hossain had worked in the estate of Karimunnissa, Begum Rokeya's elder sister. Of her sister Rokeya has spoken in eloquent praise. But Mosharraf has left for posterity a very bitter caricature of Karimunnissa's way of life, calling himself the lover of the lamb, *Verakantha*, for his having been obliged serve a woman. Male chauvinism refuses to be hidden, particularly when men are encouraged to think themselves superior, simply because they are not women.

Rokeya's own case is illustrative. She had every reason to be lost. Her father was frankly authoritarian and did not care for the Bengali language; her husband was a non-Bengali widower, and she herself became a widow early in her life. But the woman in her had revolted. She rejected the ideology of male hegemony.

Her real work does not lie in her founding a school for Urdu-speaking girls, it lies in her works in the Bengali language. In writing for the Bengali-speaking readers she came out of her confines; her urge was that of the or-

ganic intellectual to be united with the common folk to gain in power.

Rokeya was another Vidyasagar. And like that great man, she too had recognized the power of the state. Vidyasagar has been criticized by Bankimchandra for his seeking state legislation for social reforms. Vidyasagar knew better. He had full knowledge of his compatriots who would not listen to logic but would obey state laws. Rokeya has also realized how powerful state intervention can be. That understanding is reflected in the utopia she wrote in which women rule and men serve, the result being the prevailing of motherly and sisterly qualities over those of the father-like craving for power over the life of others. Education is important, but state power has to be handled properly, if education is to be made effective.

There has been a remarkable growth in female education in Bangladesh. When Dhaka University began to function in 1921 it had only one girl on its rolls and till 1936 the university convocations the Chancellors used to address only gentlemen, presumably because no woman was present, not even as a guest. Today we have thousands of female students in the campus. But that does not

signify emancipation of women or their equality with men. Women do not have the freedom to move, one of the basic indicators of a person's place in society; and they are exposed to the assaults of rapists, whose number has swelled by the inclusion of policemen among the culprits. Both the metaphorical and the real women suffer. In fact, the reality of the female situation forbids romanticism. In one of his letters, Rabindranath writes of the village women indoor in their wet cloths in the wind of a rainy day. Drenched in rain water, they were doing the chores like animals. The boatman in his "Sonar Tari" is also a worker, doing his daily duty of gathering corn in the rain. His work too must have been painful. But the boatman lends himself easily to the poetic symbolization of the eternal man seeking survival. The woman in the house is much too confined to allow imagination to put any drapery on her.

But the point is that it takes the eyes of a Rabindranath to see the woman in her distress. The prisoner in the jail of domesticity is not noticed; and in keeping her in that prison nation-building has remained, as it must, tragically incomplete.