

performing arts

Poetry Recitation is a Form of Art

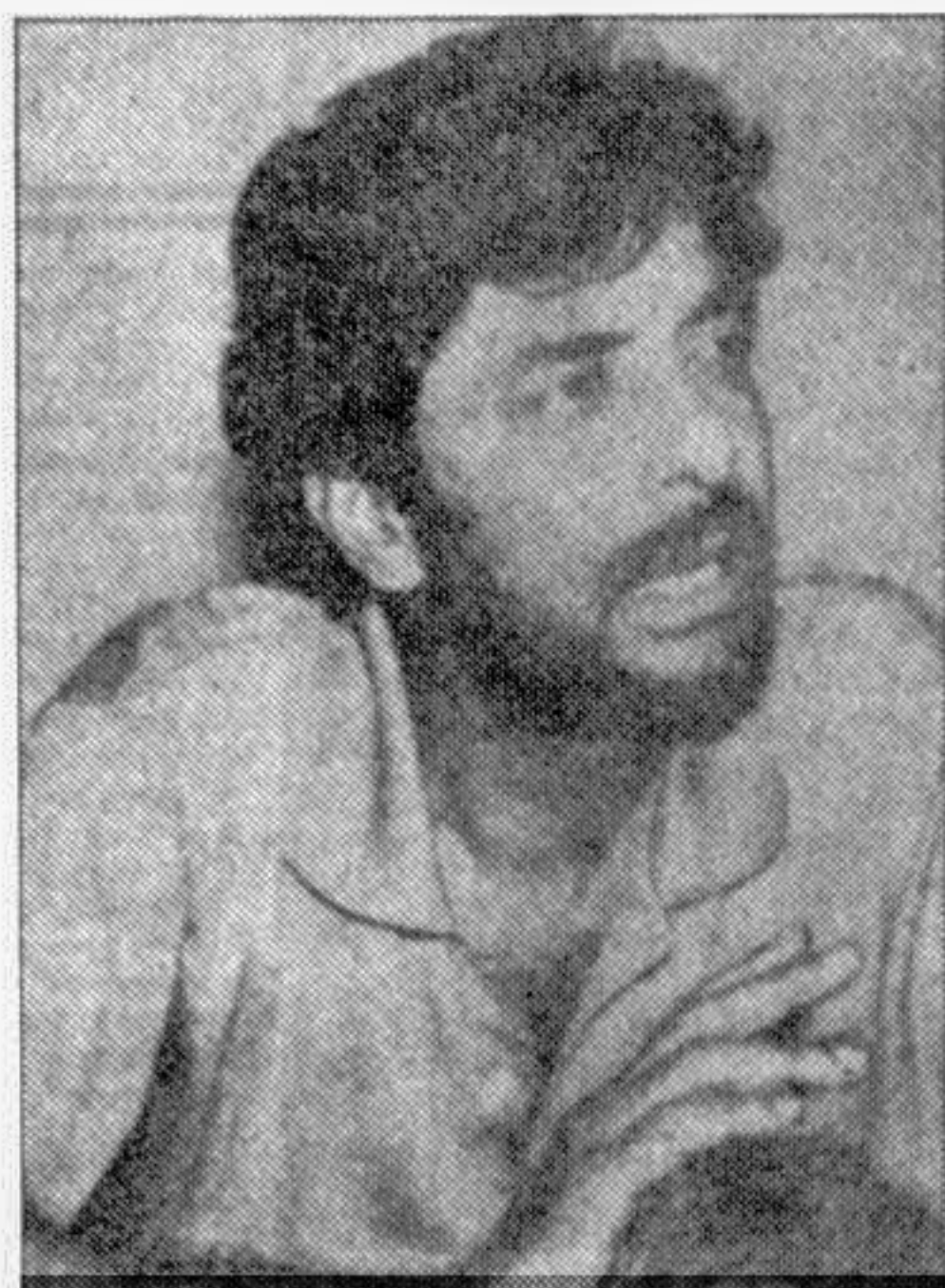
by AZM Haider

If a poet gives vent to his ideas, emotions, dreams, and visions in his poem, a reciter imparts life and soul to poets' ideas and conceptions lying buried under mounds of poets' words. Notwithstanding structure, measure and metre accorded to his verse by a bard, a reciter by the magic of his engaging performance dramatize that poem and mesmerize its audience. If one has heard Shabbyashachi's rendering of Vidrohi (rebel), one can not but agree with this assertion.

A reciter has to undergo a strenuous exercise before rendering a verse. He has to go through a poem over and over again to comprehend its innermost thoughts, scan it carefully keeping its metre in tact, if he wants to confer life on his rendering of that verse. Without this painstaking endeavour on his part, a reciter's attempt at rendering a verse will be a sheer exercise in futility. If after going through such a gruelling exercise if a reciter appears on the closed-door stage or before an open-air audience, he is certain to put up a performance which will touch the cord of emotion of his audience.

If a stage performance of a drama is considered an art, there is no reason why recitation of a poem should not be so considered. But unfortunately reciters' performances have hitherto remained unrecognized in our society which is much too deeply oriented to garments and manpower exports to snatch out time to poetry-ready session and appreciate the niceties of a reciter's performance.

In this country in fifties and sixties a few poetry lovers took to poetry recitation side by side with their professional pre-occupations. In the past poetry reading was never a source of livelihood. Nor is it at present. Hence a reciter of poetry had to and is even now required to bank on alternative profes-



Jayanta Chattapadhyaya

sion to eke out his or her living.

Instead of digressing from the theme of discussion I feel tempted to recapitulate noted names like Fateh Lohani, Gollam Mustafa, Mujibur Rahman Pathak who are considered pioneers in the field of poetry recitation. Known for their passion for poetry, they started reciting poems on various forums without any support or encouragement from any quarters. Their performance on that capacity drew unqualified appreciation from all. Later, Hasan Imam, a film artist, joined their rank. Except Mujibur Rahman, who was a college teacher and a recognized radio newscaster, all of them mentioned above were film artists.

Those were colonial days of Pakistan when Bengali poetry recitation and ren-



Aminur Rahman

dering of Tagore songs used to be looked upon with suspicion. As a matter of fact, Tagore songs were placed under total embargo in the state controlled Radio Pakistan. Naturally, therefore, recitation of Bengali poetry received no patronage or encouragement from the then governments.

In early seventies after liberation war poetry recitation received a fresh impetus when drama reciters came forward to devote themselves to poetry recitation. The drama artists who became more popular as reciters were Jayanta Chattapadhyaya, Washwore Banerjee, Kazi Arif, Pragya Labani, Camelia Mustafa, Shafi Kamal etc.

In the mid seventies Bengali Department of Dhaka University turned out to be a nucleus of declamation and poetry



Pragya Labani

movement under the leadership of Dr Muniruzzaman, a teacher of the department and a poet of considerable standing. Besides teachers and students of the Department, poetry lovers from outside joined them to strengthen their initiative. An identical effort was also launched under aegis of Rajshahi University. Poetry lovers from far-flung areas of Khulna, Jessore, Kushtia, responding to its initiative, took part in the poetry movement. Thus this laudable venture popularize poetry was taken by Dhaka and Rajshahi Universities. It helped establish close interaction between the universities, poetry lovers, intellectuals and common man.

It was during this time that Kazi Shabbyashachi frequently visited Bangladesh and recited poetry of noted



Washwore Banerjee

Bengali poets including those of rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam on BTV as well as on auditoriums before large congregations. An outstanding reciter, Kazi Shabbyashachi left an indelible imprint on poetry lovers and reciters of this country.

In the eighties several groups consisting of prominent reciters emerged in Bangladesh. Prominent among those groups were Kanthashilan, Katha, Mukta Kantha, Sharit, Shanan. These groups not only organized workshops to train young boys and girls in the technique of recitation but also staged performances on auditoriums, roadsides, traffic islands, TSC and Ramna Park. Senior reciters like Wahidul Haq, Naren Biswas and Biplob Bala etc played major role in training young

boys and girls in the technique of recitation. It may be noted poetry recitation germinated in young hearts deep love for Bengali poetry.

One of the guiding forces of the group movement to give recitation a place among the higher tier of fine arts and himself a brilliant reciter, Aminur Rahman contributed immensely to popularise Bengali poetry. But unfortunately these groups dissipated in a couple of years possibly due to socio-economic reasons.

Aminur Rahman is an odd admixture of pharmacy and poetry. By profession he is a pharmacist. But he has at the same time a deep attachment for poetry which is rare for a pharmacist. As a matter of fact, he is a poet also. An anthology containing his chosen poems has of late been published.

When Aminur Rahman has recited poems of Buddha Dev Basu, Jinananda Das, Fazal Shahabuddin, Alauddin Al Azad etc. Before recitation he first tries to get into the innermost thoughts contained in poems. Then carefully scans those poems and memorize them if possible.

After that he rehashes those poems over and over again. After such painstaking exercises he take up a poem for recitation. Naturally, therefore, his performances enrapture his audience. One must listen to his audio cassettes containing his excellent recitations of the works of the masters of modern Bengali poetry to lend credence to this assertion. Aminur Rahman has to his credit 5 audio cassettes and one video cassette. His audio cassettes, in which rendering of poems was done artistically and aesthetically, are certain to be hits from commercial point of view. Let there be more cassettes like ones brought out by Aminur Rahman. Besides edifying souls of the listeners of his cassettes, they will add new momentum to poetry movement.

reflections

The Mystery of the Wind

by AMM Aabad

THE world's most respected forecasters, gamblers, or speculators are the weather experts or climatologists, who are also recognized scientists with recognised degrees. They earn their living rightfully making the wrong guesses most of the time about the weather prediction! They have been doing it for years, and getting away with it, not intentionally, but due to circumstances beyond their control, and the limitations of modern science as practised today. The more know, the more you know how less you know. Nature veils more than it unveils.

Modern science can help the weather forecasters to a certain extent. Man might have reached the moon and explored the outer planets, but the weather report for the next 72 hours is still a 50-50 or 70-30 scientific guess. The latest confirmation of this inability to predict the weather with a fair amount of accuracy comes from a seminar held in Dhaka in 1992.

There is an "Institute for Sciences of the Universe" in France. Experts from such an august centre came over here to tell our experts that the climate of Bangladesh is baffling, and the scien-

tists have yet to understand the interaction between the wind and the sea, not only in the funnel of the Bay of Bengal, but anywhere else in this tiny planet called Earth. The pranks of EL Nino, and the new Chaos theory, cannot be ignored.

The short cycles of the natural phenomenon known as EL Nino have to be taken into consideration, as this elf has been active in 1997-98, and its effect has been noticed in Bangladesh also, casting an evil eye on the agricultural output, which depends on the favour or frown of Nature. Satellite images reveal that a band of the waters of the Pacific Ocean rose by seven inches, the highest change noticed in 150 years; and the temperature of water of the Indian ocean increased by two degrees. EL Nino created a vast lake in the S American desert, floods in Australia, snowfalls in areas never experienced before. EL Nino affects the Trade Winds, and the sea currents and temperatures at periodical intervals. This freak has been recurring for thousands of years. Yet the scientists are still investigating whether EL Nino has any contribution towards the so called and much publicised Greenhouse Effect of modern science.

Interested, I pulled out from my bookshelf Lyall Watson's "Heaven's

Breadth", a best-seller on the natural history of the wind, published in 1985 by Coronet Paperback (Watson's other bestseller is "Supernature", the science behind the working of Nature). These two books are on my Top-10 List.

The air or the wind is still a mystery, and hides more secrets than the Western Labs could decipher. Air is not so important? Then why would you breathe in and out 700 million times during an average lifetime? The animals, fish and the birds also breathe. Think of the maintenance problems of the lungs and the beating of the heart. A dead man does not breathe. What is the mystery? A human being gulps his first breath of air at his birth when the life force (ruh, prana) is supposed to enter the body. The win in Arabic refers to ruh, soul, wind, breeze, air. Why a human being cannot live without air even for a minute (the biological need is not being discussed here)?

There are many voodooos associated with the supernatural power and hold of the wind on the human mind. A body without air is dead. That is the difference between the living and the dead.

Without ventilation, a person would die of his own heat within a few hours, as the body temperature would rise two degrees per hour (2m sweat glands can produce two liters of liquid in an hour).

Cyclones are destructive, but the air absorbs only two per cent of the daily energy of the sunlight. A typhoon lasting minutes can take away (not "kill" as we say in human language) the lives of hundreds of thousands of persons and living species (Bangladesh is a striking example, being situated at the deadly funnel of the Bay of Bengal).

The early morning breeze of naseem is believed to be divinely blessed. From the soft breeze to a howling 235 km per hour cyclone, the elements are the same. From where comes this wind, and where does it go; now gently caressing, now carrying the force of a hydrogen bomb? Basking on borrowed properties, depending on reflected glory, it comes from nowhere, and goes not known where, shapeless, invisible, formless, tasteless, odourless, soundless --- a reality without moral judgement, as aptly described by Lyall Watson.

Scientists have found that physical fitness is at its best with a light breeze blowing around 10-14 miles per hour (at any temperature). At any other velocity of the breeze, more energy is used to keep comfortable. This is linked with the Law of Initial Value (human reactions to weather changes --- it would take space to explain it here). Mother Earth is also sending messages at 10 cycles (Hz) per second.

Scientifically speaking, the weathermen cannot be blamed, as they are working under great odds --- hundreds of variable factors which have to be taken into consideration for a fairly accurate forecast, which even today's supercomputers cannot solve. These thousands of variable inputs might be changing every few minutes on a vast scale in 3-D space and time. "Chaos" scientists are now offering more and more explanations from unusual angles, assisted by the new breed of cosmologists, in trying to solve the mystery of the creation of the universe. Science appears to have taken the first giant single step in the right direction --- seeking the answers outside science!

Climatology or aerobiography is still a new, infant and unexplored science, learning much from the space probes (much data are still classified). Life can be created out of non-living matter (even out of nothing in space). The first living particles are thought to be carried by the Solar Wind. Our Earth has a tail due to the solar wind. The dynamic conditions in deep space carry more information than can be detected by men-made instruments.

How powerful is the wind? Simulated studies of wind behaviour at 480,000 km/h have been carried out; while in nature wind speeds around 400 kmph

have been recorded in 1988. As early as in 134 BC, windmills in Persia pumped water. It is time to think to Wind Farms the size of jumbo-jet wings, to service 1000 rural homes. Flu killed more humans than did World War II, the carrier being the invisible and "Powerless" air. Ponder on the familiar sounding word "anima". Fang shui is an ancient Chinese science which ponders on the direction of wind influences.

Man's mind has been influenced by the mystery of the wind since the cave age. In the 15-page Dictionary of Winds, there are local names for winds familiar to the local culture. Bhoost is a small dust devil in India. Sirocco is the hot wind of Sahara (and the brand name of a car). In Japan, the Kamikaze wind cuts like a knife, and the secret wind is called Mastuboxi. A dry snow-eating wind exists in Switzerland by the name of fohn, which blows down and heats up one degree every 100m of descent, and clears the drift. I could not find the Kalbaishaski of Bengal in the Dictionary.

The effect of the breeze or wind is like that of the pawn on the chess board, and depends on its position and the opponent's moves at that point of time (Chaos effect). Imagine the symbol of a circle with a dot. The silence of space. ■

book

Ulysses: One of This Century's Best Novels

by ASM Nurunnabi

AMONG the recognised one hundred classic English fictions, James Joyce's novel 'Ulysses' has been unanimously selected by a panel of American scholars and writers as the best one written over the century. This 1922 novel tells an epic story of a man's one-day journey in Dublin, where the author was born. This had been a pioneering work employing the stream of consciousness-manner of writing in which a character's thoughts and perceptions are shown as occurring without logical sequence.

It is generally accepted that 'Ulysses' is the novel that changed the direction

of 20th-century fiction written in English. In James Joyce's depiction of the events that unfold on 16 June 1904 in Dublin, and more specifically in the life of Leopold Bloom, the basic attributes of what has come to be called modernism constitute an artistic assault upon conventional fiction. Interspersed with pungent slang, there is novelty in Joyce's language, released from the narrow confines and rules of grammar. As critics understand, Joyce's mind was freed from conventions and he sought expression in images that live in a universe beyond time and space.

Describing Joyce's technique, TS Eliot said: "It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense

panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history... Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the world possible for art."

Thanks to Joyce's own comments and hints, we know that the structure of 'Ulysses' is to a large extent based upon that Homer's "Odyssey". Yet Joyce utilizes conventional mythology in a way that is different from most of his contemporaries. Joyce is intent upon discovering a nobility and humanity inherent in a bourgeois existence that allows Leopold Bloom his wife Molly, and their Dublin acquaintance Stephen Dedalus to maintain an equal footing with Odysseus, Penelope, and

Telemachus. Joyce's "mythical method" allows these Dubliners to coexist with their Hellenic counterparts because both groups represent a paradigm of the attributes and qualities that their respective societies hold up as essential for the attainment of a meaningful, a significant existence.

In his technique, Joyce marshals the trivia and minutiae of everyday occurrences into a controlled scenario that reveals the inner lives of the characters. Coincidence is another device that Joyce manipulates to draw his characters together, since in his view there is no chance meeting that is not fraught with purpose and possibility. In the approximately 18 years that Joyce took to ponder and to write his novel, he made

sure that each of the seemingly random strands of narrative could finally be seen as coming together to form a coherent whole. Accidental encounters and topics of speculation that are reflected from one character's mind to another's serve to underline one of the novel's basic premises --- there is a shape and a form to day-to-day existence, if only we can look deeply enough to perceive it.

In order to peel away the layers of self-protection and repression in which the characters have swathed themselves, the narrative switches or changes its point of view incessantly as we move through the novel. 'Ulysses' has been credited as the work that refines and even perfects the technique of

stream of consciousness, in which the reader becomes privy to the innermost thoughts of the characters, in the direct and immediate way that fragments and snippets of perception file across the screen of the mind.

In his novel the difference between the private stream of consciousness and the public gesture is repeatedly highlighted through the actions of Stephen and Bloom side by side with the completely different public conversation in which they are involved. For Joyce, there is no need for formal closure, since what is of overwhelming concern in 'Ulysses' is the interaction of the character in which they demonstrate their innate humanity. ■