

## Interview

## The mystique of miniature plants

Arhamul Huq Chowdhury's bonsai exhibition at Bengal Foundation.

FAYZA HAQ

**S**PEAKING about his exhibition at the Bengal Foundation, which is on for a week since May 24, Arham says, "I found bonsai as I saw in some samples around me in Bangladesh and in books. I found it very decorative and fascinating so that



Arhamul Huq Chowdhury

I was intrigued by how it was grown and nurtured and that is how I got into bonsai at the age of eleven. I find this something small, beautiful, decorative and mysterious. I find that our own plants are made into bonsai so that they differ from those found in Japan and China where Bonsai originated from."

Asked if the nurturing of bonsai is difficult, Arham says, "It is a bit yes and a bit no because the problem in Bangladesh is that we cannot get the necessary equipment for taking care of bonsai. These include small pots, which I've had to make myself and clippers which I've had to have brought for me from overseas. Normally you have to be more careful in nurturing this than other plants. Pruning, watering and feeding other plants with manure is much simpler in comparison. Again, you need books from overseas to guide you in your work, and when I began more than a decade ago these books were rare in Dhaka and I had to resort to

friends and relatives to get me the necessary literature which I needed to look after the plants. Your interest leads you to do these things. I made the pots with tiles and concrete although nowadays certain pottery centres does provide you with these tiny pots. I many schools of bonsai they believe in different styles of shaping the plants such as in Suzu province in China, where bonsai originated, they used only pruning, whereas in Shanghai they used copper wiring to bend and taper the branches to the desired shape and form.

"Often, little pieces of paper are tied to the branches to give the desired bending. Generally we do pruning, and the bending though copper wire, which is very effective. Traditionally, in the authentic Japanese way, the branches were worked upon with copper wire heated with a fire of straw but nowadays the bonsai masters in Japan and China recommend the usage of wire coated with plastic."

Talking about the plants that he has used, Arham says, "I've used the local plants and indigenous items for all my pursuit of art. My goal has always been to be 'deshi'. Here I've used the Japanese and Chinese bonsai technique but I've used local plants like 'bot', 'kamini', 'tamarind', 'radhachura', 'krishnachura', 'neem' etc. In Japan and China, they in turn, use the local plants such as maple, pine and juniper, which naturally give you a different effect. Trying our own plants, which would adopt more easily in our own environment, will make more contributions to the tradition of bonsai making."

Asked if he got any advice from anybody while going about his work a pre-teenager and later as an adult in his twenties, Arham says, "I relied mostly on books although I had some relatives who inspired me and egged me on to go forward with my interest in bonsai. Yet it was very much illusive as I couldn't get a book and got one, and that began giving me glimpses of it, long after I began my bonsai. I bought the necessary books to

guide me myself from an early age yet pictures were available in calendars and some segments of tourism books on Chinese and Japanese culture. I began instinctively, so to say. 'Bonsai' is a word that means planted in a tray, and is taken from Japanese."

Speaking of the problems that he faces in his pursuit of nurturing bonsai, Arham says, "The main problem is getting the necessary tools but still 'necessity' is the mother of invention". Authentic pots, items for pruning, wires and the other equipment are not available. Again, you cannot obtain the latest books we don't get interaction with the mainstream bonsai makers. If you have the interest, you can go forward on your own".

Dwelling on his experience as a

user to do landscaping and wrote articles on them and solved problems in people's queries on the heritage of garden designing touching the plants from Greece to China, along with other topics like good fertilizers and repotting. On the whole, my writing was based on local plants. I even promoted the use of local grass in the landscaping in different ways."

Elaborating on the landscape work that he does, Arham says, "Whoever can afford a piece of land, whether on the roof or the backyard, on the front yard or at the side of the house has asked me to do this work. Big balconies have also been worked upon. I have added fountains and rock gardens to enhance the intrinsic beauty. It is like painting with plants. The plants

'bonsai' first appears in Kamakura period (1192-1333) and a picture of bonsai is seen in the famous picture scroll of the priest Honen of the same time. The painting shows trees in their natural form planted in tiny pots and shown as decorations on a shelf. This shows that bonsai was being cultivated for appreciation at that time. The picture scroll dates back to the Kamakura period, which mainly delineates the life in the Heian period (794-1191)

"Numerous essays written since the Kamakura period discuss the fact that trees and plants were gathered from the fields and mountains and made into bonsai. A famous No play called 'Hachi-no-ki' (plants in a pot), deals with the subjects of the same period, talk-

with deformed trees for a short period. This passing phase with its odd peculiarity was soon corrected and revived. A nationwide bonsai exhibition was held in Tokyo in 1914. Today bonsai is taken to be a hobby for the rich although interest is also growing in places like USA, with technical advise and equipment from Japan."

Talking about the care of bonsai, Arham says, "As bonsai is grown in a bowl, the size is controlled by the proportion of soil the roots are able to nurture in. The environment restricts the growth with the roots of the plant being controlled by the container. A balance between the roots, trunk, branches and leaves have to be kept in mind. Extra nourishment to

are trimmed, this also controls the growth of the roots and leads to a cycle similar to that which takes place when the roots are cut."

"Strong sunshine, especially the ultra-violet ray, affects the growth of the trees. Therefore, except in particular cases, such as directly after repotting, trimming etc, bonsai should be put on elevated shelves where they should be able to receive sunlight. Sunshine, which is essential for plant growth, also controls excessive growth in bonsai."

"The sun dries up the soil in the bonsai. If constant watering is used, the bonsai will grow tall and, as such, watering should be controlled. Bonsai requires daily watering but this should be in limited quantity."



Samples of Arham's local bonsai



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writer on plants in Bangla newspapers, Arham says, "The experience was an enjoyable one. I used to get a good response to it from letters coming from as far away as UK regarding various subjects like bringing a foreign plant to our local environment. I touched all the aspects of gardening from herbal, medicinal to the authentic local plants. Basically, I encouraged the cultivation of indigenous plants which is ecological because the birds and insects rely on them. I

are the live paints."

Asked if bonsai is being cruel to plants in mutating them, Arham says, "The priests in the past collected them from the mountains and fields and looked after them. I don't think that these religious men could have done something cruel that is being continued today. Since the plants give fruits and flowers, they are happy in their potted homes."

Talking about the history of bonsai, Arham says, "The word

ing of plum, cherry and pine as the trees in the pots. This proves that the appreciation of bonsai goes back to eight hundred years."

"During the Edo period (1615-1867), gardening and bonsai, with flowers and coloured leaves were immensely popular and so developed greatly. With the increase of interest in Southern Sung-style painting bonsai was also often used as painting subjects."

Meanwhile, bonsai became a fad, the branches and leaves is passed on to the roots and helps the underground growth. Repotting is also important as fresh soil can be used and extra roots can be cut from time to time."

"As for trimming and pruning, it is necessary to shape the bonsai to the required form. These cutting and shaping also reduces the growth above the ground so as to keep a proportion with the root growth. When growing branches

"Ventilation is also ensured by putting the bonsai on a high shelf as good ventilation causes the soil to dry faster and serve as an indirect way of limiting the plant growth."

Arham, who has had about ten exhibitions so far on his calligraphy, paintings, furniture, plants and embroidered and hand-painted clothes, says about his displays, "I have enjoyed working on all of them and I have no favourites."

## RECOMMENDATIONS

## Classical Vocal Recital

The High Commission of India will be presenting a classical vocal recital by Ustad Mashkoor Ali Khan on May 27 at 7:00 p.m. at the National Museum auditorium.

## Contemporary Art of Bangladesh - Trends

Organised by the High Commission of India, a ten daylong exhibition titled 'Contemporary Art of Bangladesh - Trends' is being held at the High Commission of India Cultural Centre.

The exhibition will remain open from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. till June 2.

## Bonsai Exhibition

The 4th solo exhibition of Bonsai by Arham-ul-Huq Chowdhury is being held at the Bengal Gallery (Bengal Shilpalya, 275/F, Road 27, Dhaka).

The exhibition will remain open to all from 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. everyday till May 31.



## Paintings for the Liberation War Museum

A painting exhibition by Kanak Champa Chakma and Khalid Mahmud Mithu is being held at the Sajid Art Gallery in Gulshan. The artists donated all these artworks for Liberation War Museum's fund raising.

The exhibition will remain open to all from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. till May 31.

## Summer Fest

A fashion exhibition by design house Kay Kraft titled 'Summer Fest' is being held at the WVA auditorium. The exhibition will continue everyday from 3 p.m. - 9 p.m. till May 28.

## 100th Birth Anniversary

On the occasion of the 100th birth anniversary of singer Abbasuddin Ahmed, Nazrul Islam will hold a discussion on May 26 at 5:30 p.m. at the Nazrul Bhavan, Belabadi, Maghbazar. The discussion will be followed by a cultural programme.

## TV GUIDE

<b>BTV</b>	<b>BBC WORLD</b>
Morning Session	6:30 World Business Report
9:10 Nijer Jonny	7:30 Asia Today/World Business Report
9:35 Dripta Uccharan	10:00 That '70s Shows
10:00 Drishitap	10:30 Travel Asia
10:25 Shasthatathya	11:00 Fox Kids Goosebumps
10:45 Movie of the Week: Earth Quake	1:00 Asia Today/World Business Report
Evening Session	10:30 Talking Movies
3:20 Bengali Movie: Sundari Miss Bangladesh	11:30 Eur Dir/USA Dir/Sci World/Aus Dir
5:30 Shukhi Poribar	12:30 Click Online
6:00 Khabar	1:30 Correspondent
6:35 Programme from Chittagong station	4:30 Holiday
7:00 News Headlines	5:30 This Week
7:05 Geetimallya	10:30 Wheels "Hospital"
7:30 Earth Final Conflict	11:30 This Week
8:00 News in Bengali	12:30 Earth Report
8:30 Drama: Shulimala	1:00 BBC News/Dancing in/The Street/Pole To Pole/Global/Protest/Brits
9:00 News Headlines	2:30 Talking Movies
9:30 Chitra-Bichitra	4:30 Eur Dir/USA Dir/Sci world/Aus Dir
10:00 Talk Show: Khabra Janala	5:30 This Week
10:30 News in English	
10:55 Mini Series: Sea is green	
11:30 Khabar / The News	

**EKUSHEY TV**

12:00 Ekushey Headlines	<b>STAR GOLD</b>
12:05 Ajker Potrikay	10:30 Woodland Bollywood News
12:14 Ekatturer El Dine	11:00 Geet Bahar
12:20 Mukto Khobor	11:30 Ziddi (Joy Mukherjee, Asha Parekh)
12:50 English Film: Enemy Mine	1:00 Star Geetmala
2:30 Ei Shoptho	1:30 Ek Main Aur Ek Tu
3:00 Ekushey Headlines	2:00 Hit Ya Fit
3:05 Shorashori	2:30 Geet Bahar
4:00 Mega Serial: Noorjahan	3:00 Geet Bahar
5:00 Amazon	3:30 Saturday Special: Milan (Sunil Dutt, Nutan)
6:00 Ekushey Headlines	4:00 Raaz Ki Baat (Sami Garewal, Sujit Kumar)
6:05 English Series: MacGyver	4:30 Deep Jalta Rahe (Abhi Bhattacharya, Rander, Manju)
7:00 Cartoon: Totally Tooned In	5:00 Raaz Ki Baat (Sami Garewal, Sujit Kumar)
7:30 Ekushey News	5:30 Deep Jalta Rahe (Abhi Bhattacharya, Rander, Manju)
8:00 Drama Serial: Oithi Apon	6:00 Strays
8:30 Bangla Film: Paharader	6:45 Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot
10:30 News: Simulcast from BTV	7:10 If Looks Could Kill
11:15 Ekushey Late Night News	7:30 Jubilee Plus

**ATN**

5:30 "Islamic Prog"	<b>HBO</b>
7:00 Ognibina	7:00 Strays
7:35 Nirob Kano Kabi	8:45 Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot
8:05 Drama: Uttran	9:00 The Street 06: The Ultimatum
8:40 Drama: Bhalo Basar Orane	9:30 The Ultimatum
9:15 Reporting Magazin: Chotona Probah	10:00 Beastmaster II /TBA
9:50 Special Prog. : "Ghiti Shotho Do"	10:30 The Street 06: The Ultimatum
11:00 Bengali Film: Lathial	11:45 You've got Mail
4:00 Indian Bengali film: Griho Judo	12:45 The Brady Bunch Movie
6:32 Children Prog: Shapla Saluk	1:00 Raaz
7:10 Film Prog: Surchobi	1:30 Geetmallya
7:50 Drama: Uttran	2:00 Raaz
8:25 Reporting Prog: Ghataran Nepathae	2:30 Geetmallya
9:00 Drama serial : Teen Tekka	3:00 Geetmallya
9:35 TV show : Bhabnar Khorak	3:30 Geetmallya
10:10 Megaserial Vidroh	4:00 Raaz
10:45 Bengali Film: Moner Agun	4:30 Raaz

**STAR WORLD**

7:00 The Simpsons	<b>STAR MOVIES</b>
7:30 Things People Do	6:30 Comedy : Life With
	9:30 Comedy : Life With
	10:30 Comedy : Life With
	11:30 Comedy : Life With
	12:30 Comedy : Life With
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