

Photography

A tale of two cities

A photography exhibition by two young Japanese students entitled 'Glimpses of Life: Japan & Bangladesh', now being held at DRIK Gallery, contrasts urban life in Dhaka with that in Tokyo

RECOMMENDATIONS

Musical soiree

Abhudday Sangeet Angan has arranged a musical soiree today at 6:30 p.m. at the auditorium of Bishwa Shahitya Kendra at Bangla Motor in the city.

Glimpses of Life: Japan & Bangladesh

A 7-day group exhibition titled Glimpses of Life: Japan & Bangladesh by two young Japanese photographers Machiko Honma & Kaori Yoshihara is being held at the Drik gallery. The show, which displays 60 colour and black and white photographs, has been designed to complement on going Japan Week in the city.

Art Exhibition

Japan and Bangladesh will hold a joint art exhibition at the National Museum art gallery in the city from today. The exhibition will continue till March 20 and will feature works of renowned Bangladeshi artist Mohammad Kibria, those of Noriko Yanagisawa, a Japanese contemporary artist and works of Kazi Ghiyasuddin, a Bangladeshi artist who is presently based in Japan.

Ikebana

A Japanese Ikebana workshop and demonstration will be held at Bangladesh Shishu Academy today. The workshop will begin at 10:15 a.m. and will remain open for the invited guests only. The event will allow free admission that will be held at 3:15 p.m.

Festival

A 3-day long prize-giving festival of Bishwa Shahitya Kendra will take place at Shawkat Osman auditorium of Central Public Library in the city from March 8 to March 10. Meritorious students in book reading campaign of the organisation will be awarded by reputed personalities of the country. Programs of the first day will start from 10:00 a.m. while those of the other two days will begin from 3:00 p.m.

Solo exhibition

A solo art exhibition of Abdus Shakoor will be inaugurated at Bengal Art Gallery at Dhanmondi in the city on March 9 at 6:30 p.m. The exhibition will feature recent works of the artist who is inclined to pause and look back, to lift the fraying mantle and enquire a willing legacy. The exhibition will remain open for all from 12 p.m. to 8p.m. till March 29, 2002.

Film Festival

A Japanese film festival will begin at the Institute of Modern Languages in the city on March 8 and will continue till March 11. Four films will be screened during the period with two shows, from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., every day. The films are Tsuru, Faraway Sunset, Wild Daisy, Hearts and flowers for Tora.



Machiko Honma



Kaori Yoshihara

EMILE CHABAL

I want the Bangladeshi people and the Japanese people to know more about each other", opines Machiko Honma, when asked why she wanted to stage an exhibition in Dhaka. Having travelled on the subcontinent in the past she is fascinated by the similarities and differences between what she finds here and her native Tokyo. The result of her travels is this display of photographs at the DRIK Gallery together with her friend Kaori Yoshihara.

S. M. Mayeen Ahmed, the Gallery co-ordinator, explains some of the background. "She

found out about the DRIK Gallery over the Internet and got in touch with us last year. Though we wanted to tie it in with Japan Week there were organisational difficulties and the Japanese Embassy had already finalised the programme when we got Machiko's portfolio. It is the first time Japanese work has been put on show here and it is meant to complement Japan Week."

Though the driving force behind this exhibition was Machiko, as she crystallised her plans she also invited her good friend Kaori Yoshihara to present some of her work as well. In

this way, Kaori could provide glimpses of life in Tokyo while Machiko would offer an outsider's perspective on life in Dhaka. Machiko met Kaori who is 21 and studying Sociology through the university photo club and describes her pictures of Japan's capital as "a different view on the city".

Their combined efforts have resulted in 'Glimpses of Life: Japan & Bangladesh'. A selection of 56 photographs from an original portfolio of over a hundred, the exhibition is divided almost equally between Machiko's colour pictures of Dhaka and Kaori's black and white photographs of Tokyo. The "glimpses" of life in

Tokyo feature mostly street scenes, pictures of the relentless urban skyscrapers and people on the move. Kaori seems to have made a feature of the light and dark contrasts within the city, often highlighting the shadows created by the buildings with some success.

The pictures of Bangladesh however, are full of colour. Machiko says she finds the Bangladeshis "more natural" and, as such, wanted to capture this in her photographs. She feels Tokyo is a very clean and sanitised place and she frequently has trouble explaining to Japanese people about Bangladesh. Her display also traces some

of her friendship with Dominica. An Australian, married to a Bangladeshi, Dominica met Machiko while teaching in Japan and they became good friends. The photographs follow Dominica's pregnancy and the birth of her child, giving an insight into how a multi-cultural family works. Some engaging camera angles have been used although there seems to be much more of a 'documentary' approach to the pictures with Dominica.

The more 'artistic' photographs are Machiko's impressions of Dhaka. She has taken roadside scenes and many pictures of people living out their daily lives. The press release

aptly described them as being from a "commoners' perspective".

In one picture, she has taken a man with a dinosaur mask on. Apparently, this is an important aspect to her work and she has taken many surprising and unexpected snaps using this technique. It is indeed odd not to see any real eyes on a human being!

In photographic terms, there is still the slight feeling that the pictures themselves lack originality. Greater use of filters and more imaginative compositions would have improved the overall effect. Nevertheless, the two students show promising potential the mask idea is a very clever concept, for example.

Taken as a whole, the contrasts between the two capitals and cultures are interesting ones. This being Kaori's first visit to Bangladesh, she specifically noticed Dhaka's many smells and the pervasive dust. Her photos of Tokyo portray it almost as an empty city while Dhaka is seen as alive. This observation, expressed through some very nice photographs, should give food for thought during Japan Week and encourage better interaction between the two societies.

The address for the DRIK Gallery is House 58, Road 15A (New), Dhanmondi, Dhaka and the exhibition runs until the 11<sup>th</sup> March. It will be open from 3pm to 8pm every day of the week and admission is free.

Book Launch

A unique literary gathering

A stimulating rendezvous with writers marks the launching of Bichitrita, an anthology commemorating 25 years of the monthly Bharat Bichitra, at Chameli House

TAWFIQUE ALI

THE launching of Bichitrita, a commemorative volume to mark the silver jubilee of the monthly Bharat Bichitra, witnessed a rare gathering of writers, poets, authors, editors, professors and literary enthusiasts in Dhaka on Monday.

The volume has been compiled with significant selected pieces by both Bangladeshi and Indian writers.

The impressive title published by the country's leading publishing house, The University Press Limited (UPL), features 11 essays, 18 short stories, 22 poems, 2 reminiscences and 2 miscellaneous essays. The first essay titled, Lalon Fakir O Tar Sadhona, is written by the Ex-High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh, Muchkund Dube. This essay comments on the high poetic value of Baul song. The second essay, by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, is on Rabindranath Tagore, focusing on the massive illiteracy and

poverty in the world's largest democracy. The third essay, titled Swapner Matrabhed, belongs to a Bangladeshi writer Hayat Mahmud. Other Bangladeshi essayists include Abdul Mannan Syed, Syed Makbul Maksud, Shahed Swrawardy, Shafi Ahmed, Wahidul Huq, Manjulika Roy and others.

Five translated stories, originally written in local Indian languages, have found room in the compilation. A number of writers from West Bengal, such as Ashapura Devi, Prathiba Bose, Sunil Gangapadhy, Syed Mustafa Siraj, Nabanita Dev Sen, Shamresh Majumdar, Shirshendu Mukhapadhy and Shamol Gangapadhaya, have contributed to the volume.

Among the 22 poets, 9 come from West Bengal while 13 are from Bangladesh. Bangladeshi poets include Abu Zafar Obaidullah, Al Mahmud, Al Mujahidi, Nirmalendu Goon, Biplob Das, Mahadev Shah, Rafiq Azad, Rudra Muhammad Shahidullah, Shasur Rahman among others. The board of editors of this anthology includes Belal Chowdhury, Nantu Roy and Badiuddin Nazir.

The UPL organised the evening at the CIRDP auditorium with the support of the Indian High Commission in Dhaka. Manilal Tripathi, Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, and eminent Literature Professor, Mohammad Moniruzzaman, of the Bangla Department at Dhaka University presented the commemorative volume, highlighting notable features of it. The speakers at the event opined that such an anthology would stir the readers in both Bangladesh and West Bengal. Bharat Bichitra, a publication of the Indian High Commission,



Manilal Tripathi, High Commission of India to Bangladesh, Prof. Mohammad Moniruzzaman of Dhaka University and UPL publisher Mohiuddin Ahmed (from left to right) at the launching ceremony

has by now earned a popular status among the readers in both Bengalis. "It is creditable of this magazine that despite not being a regular traditional mainstream publication, Bharat Bichitra has been successfully running for the last 25 years", said Belal Chowdhury, one of the editors of the collection.

At the event, two Bangladeshi poets Al-Mujahidi and Shikdar Amirul Haq recited their respective contributions to the volume.

The director of the UPL, Mohiuddin Ahmed, spoke about various aspects of the publication of the volume. He especially expressed his gratitude to Riva Ganguli, Cultural Affairs Counsellor of the Indian High Commission, for her labour and efforts.

Regarding the volume he said, "Since we could not accommodate all the potential pieces, Bichitrita is not to be considered as representative of twenty five years of Bharat Bichitra."

As the publisher's note on the

book puts it: "A great number of affluent writings on literary, cultural, art and social topics, extracted from Bharat Bichitra, have found place in this volume. In our view these writings will reflect a unique picture of exchange of mutual ideas among the people of two friendly countries in the field of art, culture and literature. This will expedite knowing each other more intimately and deepen existing amity between two neighbouring countries Bangladesh and India".

While talking with The Daily Star, Belal Chowdhury said that, "a notable feature of this memorial anthology is that writers from both the Bengalis have contributed to it. But my discontent remains in the fact that we could not accommodate all the valuable and representative pieces in it".

Music

Ravi Shankar and the Grammy: The sound of money

Arun Bhanot asks that if the Grammys are just so much hype and hoopla, what should one make of Pandit Ravi Shankar's award this year?

GRAMMY Night, Holy Night - sort of. It's hard not to get excited when the movers and shakers of the American music industry assemble to "honour their own". Of course, the 44th annual Grammy Awards presented this year wore all signs of the manufactured hype that has accompanied every Grammy Award ceremony in the past few years. But who cares so long as four or whatever billion humans are totally clued on to every jingly-jangly moment of this overblown frat party of some of the most brain-dead, obnoxious and vapid people in the entertainment industry? Ratings rule! So even among us jaded music journoes, there are many who tend to, for just one night, blind their eyes to this in-your-face glamorama...and pretend they are savouring a joyous celebration of music, love, brotherhood, peace - and profits.

There, I sneaked in that dirty word. But is it really dirty anymore? "Money...is the root of all evil today...." sang Roger Waters in Pink Floyd's classic The Dark Side of the Moon album in the 1970s. But, then, Mr Waters is highly unlikely to rent a tux and limo or dip his fingers in the avocado sauce at the afters bash. Is it any wonder then that subsequent to (well, actually a few years later) penning that bit of verse he was dismissed from his own band for suggesting that they disband because it had outlived its creative life? Who has heard of a band splitting for "musical reasons" these days?

Anyway, in the cold sobering light of the morning after, it is time to take a quick double take and get those stars out of one's eyes. Hey, life is R...E...A...L. And the Grammys were a dream, and a bad one at that. So, let's sharpen those knives and go for the jugular!

Most anyone knows that the Grammys are the lamest-limpst of all awards shows. The event is billed as "music's biggest night", but there is something rotten about its easy promise of familiarity. Just who picks these people? Methinks it is a bunch of American music-industry has-beens whose main goal in life, it

has been seen, is specifically not to reward adventuresome pop music, much less adventurous music of any kind. To their (dis)credit, they have been remarkably successful in that endeavour. Remember Milli Vanilli? Were you even born then?

Every year the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences holds its annual debacle, doing its best to reward evanescence. Last year those worthies took a nostalgic trip (Carlos Santana, bless him, long deserved a Grammy, but eight? Why, that puts him right up there on the same pedestal with Michael Jackson!). What thin theme held together the Grammy Awards this year is anybody's guess.

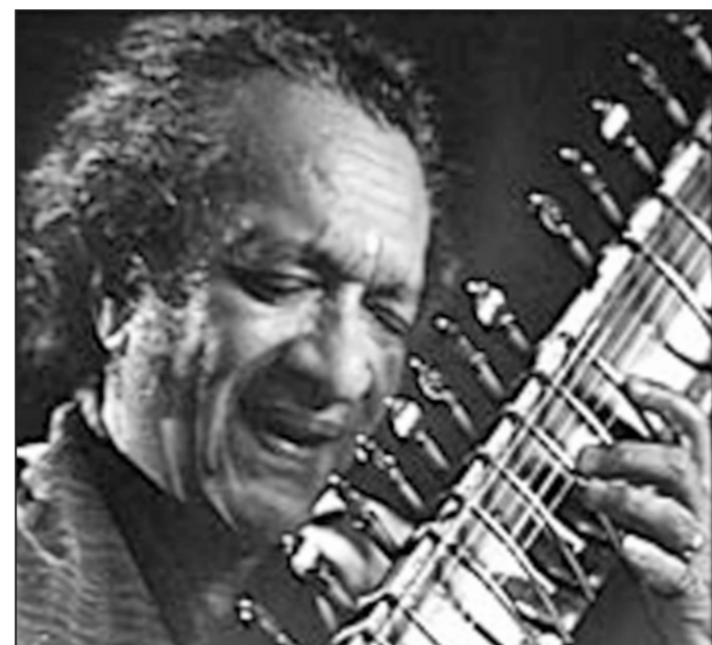
But this time, particularly, the questions cut closer to the bone. What should one make of this: when

do we say, hey what's going on? Does this mean that Americans are going to rush out to the malls, grab Ravi Shankar CDs and stack them up right next to their Nsync and Backstreet Boys albums?

Of course, Panditiji has never had any problem selling his music in the West. Or winning Grammys. This is his third, for the album Full Circle: Carnegie Hall 2000, a collection of concert recordings. The first he won in 1966 for the wonderful East Meets West jugalbandi with violin virtuoso Yehudi Menuhin. Four years later, his work in the Concert for Bangladesh earned him a Grammy. He had earlier won a Grammy nomination in the Best Folk Music category for his 1966 album Sound of the Sitar. He has been, since the mid-Sixties, the

do we say, hey what's going on? Academy's chant of honouring the best music seriously, it would seem that Ravi Shankar continues to be the pre-eminent Indian classical musician, if not the only one. That's one more reason why we cannot take the Grammys seriously. The thing is that Pandit Ravi Shankar will always outsell a Ustad Vilayat Khan (to talk of another sitar virtuoso, and to many minds a superior player) or a Ustad Akbar Ali Khan or a U. Srinivas or L. Subramaniam. Because Ravi Shankar has become more than a musician, he is a brand, easy to identify and easier to label (didn't I say that the Grammy gives are lazy too). So hundreds of Indian classical music albums may be released every year, many of them collaborations that could be clubbed under the so-called "World Music" category. But, no, unless backed by an established name in the American music industry they are likely to remain obscure, bought by a select few. Even Vishwamohan Bhatt (the only other Indian musician to win a Grammy in this category in 1994) got his 15 seconds of fame thanks to his collaboration with American slide guitarist Ry Cooder on A Meeting by the River album.

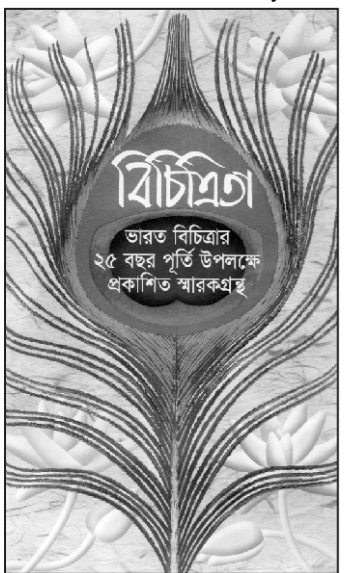
The point here is: does Pandit Ravi Shankar really need a statuette given by a bunch of marketing guys whose business is selling music and not making it? He is so far beyond it? Does Hindustani or Carnatic music need the Grammy seal of approval? It's something Pandit Vishwamohan Bhatt needs to understand. He has been deeply upset that despite winning a "prestigious Grammy" he has not been given his due by the music establishment in India. He should realise that Indian classical music or any other ethnic music shall forever be a stranger at the Grammy table, acknowledged with a nod every now and then, but one who will not be making a grand speech. We have to honour (as we do) our own deserving musicians and get over this Grammy fixation. One can't be a teenager forever.



Pandit Ravi Shankar

the gods presiding over Grammy decide to honour "one of our own" - sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar? Do we rise and cheer, maybe even "jangle our jewellery" as Lennon once famously said? I mean, "This is great! The Americans are at last recognising our classical music!" Or,

most recognised face of Indian classical music abroad, among kings and commoners alike. Thanks to George Harrison and Woodstock and spaced out hippies, the raga entered the Western lexicon through the soulful strains of Ravi Shankar's sitar.



Jacket cover of the commemorative volume Bichitrita