

THE wild leaves and veins wrap many of our old heritage buildings like octopus tendrils. But what has masked the traditional folk performances, songs and theatres that once had brought the beat of the soul, the music of the heart, the harmony of the spirit of the people of this country? These religious or secular cultural aspects are being devoured by the so-called modern and urbanized influences. Today, many of us are ignorant of Gazir Gaan, Gazir Yatra, Gazir Pat, Puthi Pat, Kiccha-Kahini jari and so on and on. Saymon Zakaria has been travelling to different parts of Bangladesh to find out and let others know of what remains of the indigenous cultural performances, which still survive like the flickering light of a burnt away candle. In his effort to spare them from the claus of perish and give our future generations a touch of our r indigenous art, culture and touch of our heritage, he has published a book on some of the indigenous performances. Here is a translated section of his article on **Gazir Gaan**.

The Fokre Paala of the Gazir Gaan (The Ascetical Drama of the Gazi Song)

Dudhshar, a village in Shaikupa thana in Jhenaidaha district. There resides Rowshan Ali Jowardar, one of the lead singers or narrators (*Gayen*) of the *Gazir Gaan* (Gazi's song). The all time involvement with his performance keeps this man away from his home most of the time. In his absence, I get the address of Bholia, the leader of the

the symbolic icon, *Gazir Asha* (Hope of Gazi) north of the audience, music played on. Among the musical instruments were flutes, harmonium, *juri* or *Mandira* (a small hollow pair of cymbals) and the *dhol* (instrument of percussion which is not so much in width as a drum but longer in size). After the group instrumental, the lead singer presented a devotional song with his troupe accompanying him in stages.

Jodi eshe thako doyal torate kangal/ (Doyal) amare niyo paar koriya/

Ami namaj to pori na, roja to rakhi na/ Paar kore dao doya koriya/ (Ami) bhubete ashiya mayajale poriya/ Giyachhi tomake bhuliya.../ If you come, Oh Merciful to rescue the destitute / (Merciful) Please take and make me cross

(I) do not offer my prayers, nor do I fast / Please have mercy and make me cross

(I) coming into this world / about you I have forgotten/ under the spell of infatuation...

Then started the singing in praise of the performance which in Bengali is known as the

Ashor Bandana. After the song of praise, as the two *Chukris* (female impersonators) stand up, one from the troupe remarks, *You with the sweet smile on the face, the rhythm of the spring, with the tune of youth, explain all that you can to the people* ...

And immediately the *Chukris* danced to the beats and tunes of the



In search of our indigenous performances

troupe who resided in Bhatoi Bazar and succeed to meet him. At first I had to prove my identity not as an NGO worker but a learner and an observer of folk performances. My learning was through wandering from one village to another and from those indigenous noble and theatre artists. They are our true teachers our guide. As discussions followed we humbly mentioned our keen interest to see a performance and were assured of being notified. Later, we came to know that two days later there would be a performance in Kaliganj thana and can accompany them. This episode about the *Gazir Gaan* was the experience we gathered there.

The performance was to take place at the high school in Raghunathpur village. A small *shamiana* (canopy) was hung and three mats were placed side by side. The *Gazir Gaan* singers and the instrumentalists took their seats facing north on the square shaped mat. Then commenced the starting ritual. As the lead singer implanted



instrumental, skillfully. This part is to entertain the spectators and show and reveal to them what dance can do to entertain a soul. Referring to *Gazir Gaan*, it must be mentioned that in this area there is a reactionary or negative attitude about this performance. They say it is indecent. To some of them I had put up the question as to why do they think it is indecent. In answer, they mentioned about indecent bad words and vulgar gestures. I protested humbly saying, if I judge good or bad only according to my vision or from the position where I stand, then it might be a great mistake. If I judge from my viewpoint, I would realize that besides myself, many things in this world is inconsistent and if I judge considering the usual spectators of the *Gazir Gaan* as well as the performers' viewpoint, then would I find them so indecent or obscene? Each individual has the knowledge of good or bad and for the singers and the spectators or the audience of *Gazir Gaan*, the performance is

as recreational as it is of devotion. Some show their devotion by praying, some by worshipping (*Puja*), some by offering a particular sacrifice to the deity on fulfillment of a prayer (*Manot*) and some may look for some other way to express their devotion. *Gazir Gaan*, whatsoever includes humour or even obscenity, ultimately it is something of sheer devotion.

There are altogether 7 *Paalas* (episodes) in the *Gazir Gaan* performance.

1. Marriage 2. Didar Badshah 3. Dharma Badshah 4. Erong Badshah 5. Taijel Badshah

6. Tara Dakait 7. Jamal Badshah

But the performance commences with the "*Fokre Paala*" depicting the story behind Gazi and Kalu's becoming ascetics after which continues seven episodes. Gazi is very serious and sincere in his work, while the character of his brother Kalu is more comical and he is the one who creates the humour through his role. Through his jeers and meaningless dialogue and

activities he very skillfully takes the audience into the embedded sorrow and depth of the story. Here are some quotes from the "*Fokre Paala*". After the dance performed by the "*Chukris*", the lead singer stands up and delivers some introducing words in his local accent.

My home is in Dudhshor, beside Bhatoi Bazaar. I may present you songs . . . but I don't have the capability to touch your souls. I have learnt singing in a very young age. If you may enjoy . . . then can I sing. For any mistakes, please forgive. Besides, good words of one place is an abusive terms in the other. Maybe the tune of a song is not the same in another place. Songs are sung in different tunes in different places.

I began to recollect explanations of decency and indecency of *Gazir Gaan* relating to the last two lines of introduction. The fact that there remains a difference between attitudes and opinions with respect to different places and regions is well acknowledged by the *Gazir Gaan* singers but the so called educated do not possess that



bright/You are Allah, the guide/ to the first man Adam, life's might/

With this starting of the song the lead singer starts the main narration of the *Fokre Paala* of Gazi and Kalu and at the beginning he requests Kalu earnestly to become Gazi's companion in his quest of becoming an ascetic leaving behind the earthly pleasures and luxury. As this song ends Kalu comes up and takes part in dialogue (in verse and prose) based drama with the lead singer. The statements and their replies are rather nonsense, comic in nature and sometimes with the use of indecent words. (**To be cont'd ...**)

insight or do not have the courage to accept it. So, I praise these singers of Bengal I salute them. After the introductory words of the narrator, starts the instrumental and then the *Dhua* or starting chorus of the narrative passes from the lead singer to his members of the chorus.

Oh Lord, Graciously, listen you oh saint/Allah, You are Light.../ Created by you is the beginning,

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Original Story: SAYMON ZAKARIA
Translated: Zakia Rahman, architect
Photographs: SAYMON ZAKARIA,
BAHARUL KARIM SHOHAGAND
ABU SAYEED JOARDAR KOLLOL

