

Face to Face

Ajmal Husain: A blend of journalism and art

FAYZA HAQ

AJMAL Husain, an artist based in Paris, was here in Dhaka to see the exhibitions on Zainul Abedin. He is the son of Altaf Hussain, the founder editor of *Dawn*, of Pakistan. He was a journalist from 1946 to 1972, beginning his career as a political cartoonist in *Dawn*. 'I had graduated from the Scottish Church College in Calcutta and learnt journalism on the job. I worked there since 1947 as columnist and cartoonist, going to USA in 1949 to do Masters in journalism at the Columbia University. I also attended art classes in the evening,' reminisces Hussain. Art was his passion since his school days and he painted along with his career as a journalist.

In 1953, Ajmal was the editor of

the *Illustrated Weekly of Pakistan*, having spent three months with *TimeLife* magazine in New York. He was also the editor of the Sunday magazine of *Dawn*. At the same time, he formed the Fine Arts Society and was a member of the Arts Council of Pakistan. Thus he had two parallel streams flowing in his life: one being his profession and the other his passion. 'I don't know how I managed to combine the two,' said Ajmal.

His father, Altaf Hussain, was an amateur watercolour painter and he used his father's paints and brushes. The latter encouraged him in his painting. In 1951 he had classes for a year in New York but apart from that he learnt on his own. He had been exposed to Paris galleries in his visit in 1950 and was fascinated by the French Impressionists like Cezanne, Renoir and

Degas. While in New York he was a regular gallery visitor too. He took up art in a big way in 1952, doing three political cartoons a week for *Dawn* and painting.

I met Zainul Abedin in 1942 in Calcutta when he was a teacher at the Art School. I came across him with Jasimuddin and Abbasuddin. I was the youngest of the group. Zainul Abedin was in Karachi when I came there in 1947. Apart from Zainul, I also came across SM Sultan in those early days. Sultan had a big beard and wore saffron coloured clothes. The early contemporary artists included Zubaida Agha and Parvez Ahmed. We had a small art movement which led to the Arts Council of Pakistan,' reminisces Ajmal.

Today he is a full time artist, living in Paris since the early 70s when he fell out with Zulfiqar Ali



Sylphie with lilies by Ajmal Husain

Bhutto, while working with *Dawn*. His work often depends on his moods. Sometimes the desire to paint hits him like a wave and he works non-stop for days in crayon or oil or acrylic. If he is working in pastel he carries on the series with that. He might work on a particular medium for a whole year. After a barren period he could be inspired again. He listens to western classical music, sometimes, while working and sometimes not. Sometimes he works till 4am. 'I do not use the watercolour as Zainul Abedin and the Bengal School have done,' Ajmal says. He always carries his sketchpad with him and he travels frequently, leaving his 30-year home in Paris and going to places in Europe and USA.

His first solo exhibition was in

1952 in Germany and it contained Impressionist paintings. The same year he had one in Geneva, Paris and Madrid. He got good reviews for his work. His next exhibition was in New York the same year. This same exhibition went to Washington which was well-covered by the press. 'My objective was not to be identified as an ethnic artist. I wanted to present art from our part of the world on a universal level. I had to struggle hard so that my images were not a curiosity,' maintains Ajmal.

Today, Ajmal is the winner of three coveted European prizes and has settled in Paris with his wife and two children, visiting Bangladesh and Pakistan from time to time.



Picnic in the Forest by Ajmal Husain (inset)

CULTURAL FEAST

National Zainul

Festival 2004

Schedule

December 12-January 07

Special Exhibition of Zainul Abedin

Time: 11am to 7pm on weekdays and 3:00pm to 8:00pm on Fridays

Venue: Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts, 275/F, Road 27, Dhammandi, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy and Bangladesh National Museum.

Exhibition



Title: Bandhan

Venue: Shilpangan, House 25, Road 5, Dhammandi

Time: December 30-January 8, from 10am to 1pm and 5pm to 8pm

Filmdom hits upon a 'novel' idea!

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

In a scenario where there is a dearth of good stories, the ever-enterprising filmdom hit last year upon a 'novel' idea of attracting viewers.

The stories of at least four to five films were based on novels. These include Chashi Nazrul Islam's forthcoming *Shasti*, based on Sarat Chandra Chattapadhyay's novel, Humayun Ahmed's *Shyam Chhaya* and Morshedul Islam's *Duratta*, based on a story of Humayun Ahmed. Actor-turned-director Touqir Ahmed won an award at the 2nd International Film Festival for his debut film *Joyjatra*, based on a novel of Anjaj Hossain. Both Humayun and Touqir's films project perilous boat journeys of groups of refugees during the Liberation War.

Another milestone in the year was the most hyped Bangla film *Chokher Bali*, a celebrated literary work of Rabindranath Tagore. Starring Aishwarya Rai, acclaimed filmmaker Rituparno Ghosh from West Bengal, India, brought the story on celluloid. Shot at Ramnagar, near the holy town of



Aishwarya Rai and Raima Sen in Chokher Bali

Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh and Kolkata, *Chokher Bali* deals with the social ills of the then Bangla society, besides widow remarriage and inhuman practice of *satidaha* ritual. The former Miss World plays the character of Binodini, a widow who refused to

lead a life of deprivation.

Novels provide a ready-made platform on the screen for filmmakers who use 'cinematic liberty' to suit the audience. The box office earnings of such ventures has not been very encouraging in the past, with the majority of such

films failing to achieve commercial success. However, film analysts generally appreciate the trend of filmmakers drawing inspiration from literary works, even though there could be distortions in the screen version.

TV GUIDE

All programmes are in local time. The Daily Star will not be responsible for any change in the programme.

News Bulletin

BTW
News Headlines (Bangla) at 8:55 am; 12:10 pm, 2:00 pm, 3:00 pm, 4:00 pm, 7:00 pm.
News (Bangla) at 8:00 am; 1:00 pm; 5:00 pm, 8:00 pm.

News (English) at 3:00 pm, 10:00 pm.
Late Night News (Bangla and English) 11:30 pm.

CHANNEL-i
News (Bangla) at 7:15 am, 9:00 am, 7:15 pm, 9:00 pm, 10:30 pm, 12:15 pm.

Telecast of BTW news (Bangla and English) at 9:30 pm.

ATN BANGLA
News (Bangla) at 7:00 am, 10:00 am, 2:00 pm, 7:00 pm, 10:00 pm, 11:00 pm.

Telecast of BTV News (Bangla and English) at 9:30 pm.

TVA
News Headlines (Bangla) at 10:00 am, 12:00 pm, 6:15 pm, 9:30 pm.

News (Bangla) at 7:30 am, 2:00 pm, 5:00 pm, 7:30 pm, 10:30 pm.

Telecast of BTV News (Bangla and English) at 11:30 pm.

TARA BANGLA

News Headlines (Bangla) at 5:30 pm, 7:30 pm.

Tara News (Bangla) at 8:30 pm, 11:30 pm.

Tara News Bangladesh (Bangla) at 9:30 pm.

BBC WORLD

Every hour on the hour

CHANNEL-i

09:45 Trittyo Matra
10:30 Life Prescription
11:30 Hridoye Mati O

08:50 Jhamela
Bochor Periye
Shanskruti
Drama Serial:
Manush

11:25 Chithi Pelam
Aj Duprey O Citycell

01:00 Ebong Cinemar Gaan
01:30 Public Reaction

01:35 Bangla Feature Film:
Dour (Alexander Bo, Eka)

03:45 Banglar Gaan
04:15 Special Programme

04:45 Sa Re Ga Ma

05:30 FTC Business Talk

06:00 Music Plus

06:30 Flop Show

07:50 Shanchita

08:25 Rupkatha

09:35 Drama Serial: 69

10:00 Drama Serial:
Banchley Je Ki Shukh

09:00

09:30 Drama Serial: Mohona

10:35 Business This Week

ATN BANGLA

01:00 Chamber, The

01:15 Daredevil

10:02 Alankar

10:30 Gallery

11:00 Mon Amar Shandhan

Kori

11:30 Ki Kotha Tahar

Shathey

12:02 American Cinema

01:00 Potrikar Kabhor

TVC

02:35 Drama Serial: Jhut

Jhamela

7:00 The Simpsons

7:30 Uc: Undercover

8:00 Billboard Us

Countdown

9:30 Britannia Iog

10:30 The Bold & The Beautiful

11:00 Top Drive Getaway

12:30 Philly

STAR MOVIES

1:30

The Chronicle: News From The E

2:30 Movie Lovers Road

3:30 The Apprentice

4:30 Ed

5:30 Journeys In Asian Cuisine

6:00 Travel Asia

6:30 Baywatch Hawaii

7:30 The Simpsons

8:30 The Kumars At No. 42

9:00 Rendezvous With Simi Garewal

9:30 Billboards

10:30 Cover Story

11:00 Top Drive Getaway

12:30 Koffee With Karan

STAR PLUS

08:30 Dharm Aur Hum

9:30 Sankshipt Ramayan

10:30 Yatra

11:00 Meri Mrs Chanchala

11:30 Chalti Ka Naam

Antakshri

12:25 Film Toppers

12:30 Chupa Rustam

1:00 Musafir Hoon Yaaron

1:30 Mirch Masala

2:05 Hit Filmlein Hit

2:30 Dil Hi Dil Mein

6:00 Hit Filmlein Hit

6:30 Sangeet: 20 M

7:30 Fox Kids Sunday

8:30 Super Sunday Journey

to the Center of The Earth

9:30 Film Topper

7:30 Ssshhh...Koi Hai...

7:30 Koffee With Karan

7:30 Koffee With Karan

PICK OF THE DAY

The Temple of the Tigers
On Animal Planet at 7:30pm
Documentary Programme
Best of Animal PlanetThe New Shobuj Opera
On ATN Bangla at 8:30pm