

THE second episode of the Raash Festival, *Rash Mane Roshomoy Dhara* took place at night. The three platforms or stages for the performance had been decorated in specially patterned paper and bamboo. Before the main performance, the *Ozha* (a Bengali word referring to the *Guru* or master) or *Raashdhar* ie the master or Raash guide, the "Shutridhari" (actors) and instrumentalists, all had taken their seats on one side of the entrance to the stages. The spectator and devotees specially the women sat around the stage in a circle.

At midnight, the main episode of the *Rashleela* with the combined harmony of music followed by a devotional song based on classical modes began. Then came the 1<sup>st</sup> part with the *Agomoni* (song of welcome). A young girl came and bowed low and started dancing. She was dressed in a *Meikumbi* (A scarf over the head), a *Letreng* (at the waist), a *Khandol* (dress from waist downwards) and *Tankha and Khudope*. An elderly and experienced Manipuri, Bhagindra Singh told me that she was *Brinda*, the envoy of *Sri-Radha* (the cowherd loved by Sri Krishna). Brinda was already making varied dance postures with her hand while the singers accompanied her with a song to the tune of the welcome song. It said, Joy Brindaban chintamonidham / Shaji Aailo Brindadevi Oti



## THE RAASH LEELA

# Showers of Romantic Ecstasy

*Rashleela* (The Play of Raash) comprises of two episodes: The "Dance of the Cowherd (Sri-Krishna) - "Sattya Ami Goshthe Jabo" (I, the truthfully would go to the pasture) and "Raashleela: Rash Mane Roshomoy Dhara" (Raash means the shower of romantic ecstasy). This article depicts the experience of Saymon Zakaria when he had visited Madhabpur Shiv Bazar to witness the *Rashleela* performed by the Manipuri people. The first episode that was performed during daytime till dusk fell was described in the previous article. The previous episode relates to the earthly demands of life, relating to work and survival and thus depicts one face of Krishna's life. This episode relates the other face of Krishna, which depicts his physical and spiritual life as described in the myths of Radha Krishna.

monohar...  
Hail Brindaban  
Chintamonidham / Brinda devi,  
has come all dressed up, magnificent...

(\*the woods near the town of Gokul in Mathura associated with the romance of Sri-Krishna and Radha)

The song also stated the visit of Krishna to the woods and asked the girl to make preparations to welcome him. With the song, devotees and fans sitting around the stage threw sweets at the dancing girl who came running to collect them. Another emotional female devotee entered the stage and lying on the floor started crying out loud, only to be taken away. As Brinda's welcome song came to an end she started the *Aarati* or lamp dance with a spectacular wave of rhythm created by the light all around while Brinda swirled round the tree in the centre. The *Pradip* or lamp comprised of several multicoloured candles and sticks (like the incensed ones) stuck into a lump of earth. They were all lit on a plate of *Kasha* (Metal) and the flames danced to the beat of Brinda's frenzied steps while the singers sang

Ami Krishner preme kangalinee / Brindabane Brinda durbhagini...  
I am ardently desirous for the love of Krishna / In Brindaban, I am the miserable Brinda...

The rest of the song depicted how the lover begged to have an opportunity to serve and devote herself at Sri-Krishna's feet and make her life successful. After the song Brinda kept the plate on the floor and continued dancing. Then she took a glass in her left hand in which pink coloured water with some incense was visible. In an

instance, Brinda could be seen with a stem of *Patabahar* (a tropical hedge-plant of the *Croton* genus) in her right hand which she used to sprinkle the incensed liquid at intervals. She was a beautiful woman who spread a pleasant fragrance. While she danced so the singers were heard with a new song, which stated how Brinda Devi would come to the woods of Brindaban, which was in bloom and how she would collect various flowers. Sometimes the singers sang other verses, related to how Brinda would be decorating Brindaban with beauty and fragrance for Sri Krishna. After this came the flower collection part where Brinda took in her hand a plate to collect flowers. The singers then had begun to sing a new song related to the making of a wreath with varied and beautiful flowers. The song started like this -

Tooli Ful nana jati / Champa ful tooli ani / Gathbo mala sharabela / ...

I pick flowers of varied species / I pick the Champa (flower of the magnolia family) /

I will make a wreath all through the day...

The singers went sang on how the wood had been flavored by the sweet fragrance of flowers adorned by Brinda. Brinda placed the seat she was carrying on the stage and sprinkled some incensed water on it withdrawing herself. The first part of the dance drama of *Raash* ended. With the arrival of a young boy as Krishna, the second part began. Krishna was seen sleeping on a side. He was holding a decorated flute in one of his hands while he was magnificently dressed in a headdress of multi coloured peacock feathers, red coloured *Letreng*, *Kopnum* etc.

From the headdress hung flowers, *Jura* or hair, there were *ful-daan* (flowers) or garland around the neck, Pungpong around the arms and ornaments like the *Thabereth*, *Thabol*, *Ghungur*, *Kharu* etc over his body. It seemed that the real Krishna had appeared from the age of *Dapor* (The third of the four yugas or ages of the world according to Hindu mythology). Krishna was pretending to be asleep while the singers sang another song that awakened him. He stood up with the flute in his hand and started a dance along as the singers changed their song. The words of the song had Krishna's heart spoken and so he began dancing in a new rhythm. The singers also found new words and tune of rhythm to match the beat of the dance. At one stage when Krishna had finished his dance and took his place on the seat that Brinda had kept earlier, the second part of the play ended with the repetition of a stanza sung by the singers. Thus each of the acts was mesmerized by the musical harmony of separate tunes and songs.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the play was occupied by *Radha* and her companions. They entered the stage when Krishna had taken his seat. It was a pleasant scene with all the dancing companions singing along with the musical troupe. This song was titled as the welcome song of Radha and her companions. During the song, each group of the companions performed individually and finally they performed all together dancing around Radha. In the 4<sup>th</sup> part, the companions mentioned Radha's meeting with Krishna. *Radhika* (Radha) then expressed her eagerness to see Krishna and together with the companions

proceeded to see Krishna.. Seeing her hurry Radha's friends requested her in a song to slow down and be calm. They sang

Dhire cholo ogo Radhe / Prambondhur dorshone / Dhire dhire cholo Radhe

Druo gele pran harabe / Dhire gele Krishna pabe

Go slow O dear Radha / to see your heart's passion / Go slow, Radha.

If you hurry, you may lose your life / If you go slow, you will get Krishna

So Radha had to slow down her eagerness and with that ended the 4<sup>th</sup> part. The 5<sup>th</sup> or final part of the play shows Radha with her friends come face to face with Krishna, then Krishna asked her, "Why have you come at this late hour of night to Brindaban?" Radha stood embarrassed and on her behalf, the friends asked forgiveness from Krishna. Krishna being pleased with their reaction looked at Radha and it made Radha very happy. At that moment both of them expressed their joy, which was also shared by the companions. They began to dance around the lovers Radha-Krishna who were then standing as the *Jugal Murti* (the image of Radha and Krishna united in divine love). As the song of happiness was sung, many devotees from the crowd came and fell down on the feet of the couple. While the dark of the night had begun to fade into the dim light of dawn, the play or *Raashleela* that had no written script came to an end after a long night of celebration that showered the rains of love and ecstasy.

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