

Theatre

Behular Bhashan

The harsh reality of oppression on women

ERSHAD KAMOL

A three-day presentation of the play *Behular Bhashan* was staged at Natmandal auditorium at Dhaka University from November 15 to 17. The play is an analysis of oppression on women in a male-dominated society.

The artistes Tania Sultana, Nahida Sultana Swati and Farida Akhtar Lima, former students of the Department of Theatre and Music of Dhaka University, staged *Behular Bhashan* based on the six commandments of *Padmapuran* or *Manoshamangal*.

The narrator begins her tale of a traditional 600-year old rural myth of *Manoshamangal* with a modern connotation. After the devotional song, *Akhanbhasha* (excerpt from the myth) depicts more than a mere ritual of goddess *Manosha*, which the rural bards present in their *pala-gaan* to demonstrate the conflict between religion and power. Narratives, written in verse form, portray the bitter experiences of a loyal wife, Behula, at the hands of society.

Behula's journey with the corpse of her husband Lakhindar, who died on their wedding night due to the conflict between her in-law Chand Sawdagar and goddess *Monosha*, on a boat has an inner meaning.

During the journey, Behula comes face to face with seven evil male-characters who symbolically represent the wicked instincts of masculinity, including lust, cruelty, hypocrisy, extravagance and pretension. And Lakhindar's resurrection represents his giving up of these evil instincts. The



A scene from the play

aim in the play is to show the union of two innocent human beings. Selected songs from *Padmpuran Gaan* and *Padmar Nachan* and other indigenous trends have been used in the play.

As the director of the play, Jamil Ahmed's approach is radically different from the traditional directors who basically follow either the European drama form or mixed art form. In Jamil's experienced hands, the decaying rural art form--*Monosha Pala*--has achieved a more polished and aesthetic shape. He has unfolded the play through a narrator. The

narrator introduces every new experience that Behula undergoes in her journey.

The most interesting part of Jamil's indigenous art trend is the smooth transitions of different sequences. No 'blank space' was found during the transformation of narration to characters. The acoustics of *Dohars* (chorus) and *Bayens* (orchestra) and body movements of the artistes created a variety of sequences on the empty stage. Set designer Kamaluddin Kabir has made an *aashon* (a square shaped empty space) in the middle of the

theatre hall and the audience sat at the four corners of the stage.

White general light wash has been used throughout the play.

As the story-teller in the play, Lima's high-pitched voice modulation was praise worthy. Tania as Behula fulfilled the demands of her character. Swati's representation of seven evil men--who symbolically represent the dark sides of men--was enjoyable. Swati's body language was perfect, particularly in the sequence where Behula faces the culture.

Amitabh Reza

An adman with flair

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Making waves in the ad film world is 30-year-old Amitabh Reza. While popularising the 35mm camera, he has given viewers a veritable feast. Thus, while they may quickly switch channels when an ad appears, they remain glued to Amitabh's ad films. Take for instance, the commercials for Lab Aid, Grameen Phone (which involves the song *Nil Doria*), Djuce and Toshiba Colour Television. And according to him the best is yet to come.

Now Amitabh is in the process of launching a strong professional film unit that can deliver the goods.

Amitabh Reza studied in BAF Shahin School and College before going to Poona University, Pune for his economics degree. When asked about how he ventured into making films, he says it was always his childhood passion and it still is.

What sets Amitabh apart from his counterparts? For one, his ads include soulful music accompanied by meaningful lyrics, which is catchy and echoes in the minds of viewers. Not only this, he scores on the quality of picture, imaginative camera work and neat editing -- in short his ads are a total quality package.

To maintain high standards, he has to go to foreign lands for the post-production of ads and that can be quite expensive. The need of the moment, believes Amitabh, is a private sector post-production facility so that films shot in this country do not have to be sent overseas. He also emphasises that when more ads will be on celluloid, this industry will develop greatly.



Amitabh Reza behind the camera

Exhibition

Iffat Ara Dewan

Flowers all the way



Iffat Ara Dewan

Flowers in all their glorious and infinite variety--ranging from *Aparajita* and *Alamanda* to Gypsy flowers and *Dolonchampa*-- are a recurring leitmotif in Tagore singer-painter Iffat Ara Dewan's art works. Apart from what Iffat calls these "symbols of beauty and hope", there are new elements in her 59 paintings on display at Shilpangan Art Gallery till November 30. For one, she has used acrylic on canvas in addition to her favoured chalk pastels. For another, nature and home interiors are more prevalent than before.

Take the instance of *Fruits in space*. This painting in acrylic depicts a fruit shop with an array of hanging grapes, melons, papayas, apples, pineapples and oranges. With a predominant background of red, with green and

yellow, there is a child-like quality to this work. The simplicity of the lines and hues "comes instinctively", says the serene Iffat.

Another eye-catching art work is *Lilted light of the deep*, in acrylic on canvas. This painting, with bold hues of blue, yellow and green, is bright and attracts attention immediately. Viewers are also likely to be spellbound by the ethereal beauty of moonlight at midnight and the solitary *Dolonchampa* in a vase.

Iffat says that she draws inspiration through spending time with nature and her garden, in particular. She has taken a hands off approach to her garden and enjoys the sight of the trees and plants which have been allowed to run wild. In such settings, she has seen birds such as woodpeckers and kingfishers. Her creativity is also spurred by seeing the works of great Impressionist masters such as Van Gogh, Monet, Bonnard and Pissarro. Other favourites are Matisse and Modigliani.

Iffat's goal is to carry on painting, though as she says, she sometimes has to slow down because of her singing. Meanwhile, she believes that such exhibitions can prod her to take a disciplined approach to her work. Otherwise, says a laughing Iffat, "I might get lazy." Hard to believe when one sees her prolific work.

BY KAVITA CHARANJI



A view of Iffat's work

Musical Soiree

Panchashwar remembers Subal Das

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Subal Das, a revered composer of modern Bangla songs, departed on August 16 this year. In his remembrance, Panchashar organised a musical night on Wednesday.

The event started with eminent personalities like KG Mustafa and Robin Ghosh nostalgically recalling some pleasant memories of Subal Das. Quite a few among the audience were moved by such words, specially those who were close to him.

Right after the discussion, the musical programme began with Nasima Shahin. She sang two solo numbers and one duet. *Tumi je amar kobita*, a beautiful romantic song, was a delight for the crowd. Sung by Nasima Shahin and Sumon Majumder, the song received tremendous applause. After the duet Sumon Majumder rendered the title track of lyricist KG Mustafa's album *Trishna Amar Hariye Gchhey*. Next came Farhana Akhtar who performed two melodious romantic songs -- *Shondhar chhaya naamey* and *Ami kamon korey bolbo*. After Farhana Akter, Mamun Jahid held the audience spellbound with *Tumi amar shadhona* and *Kobita likhini*. *Likhechhi tomar naam*. The last three songs of the night were



Artists performing at the event

performed by Suparna Sengupta: she sang two Bangla numbers and one Urdu number. The songs were a melodious treat for the ears.

The event revealed the vacuum caused in the cultural world by the demise of Subal Das.

Cross-current

Madonna's Confessions on a Dancefloor

Madonna has headed back to the disco for her new album, *Confessions on a Dancefloor*, which has been released recently. It has earned her some of the best reviews of her 22-year career.

In stark contrast to 2003's introspective *American Life* album, she has dusted off her glitterball, strapped on her pink stilettos and sampled Abba on latest hit single *Hung Up*.

Has Madonna reinvigorated her music career, or is she merely throwing one final dance party for her long-term fans before settling down to record more sedate material?

She may not have been to the New York clubs in recent years but her enactment of the 80's New York club culture in her recent album already has her fans as well as dance music lovers tapping to the tune.



Saif is Colgate's latest poster boy

Bollywood stars are always a safe bet for brands, when they want celebrity endorsers. In keeping with this trend, Colgate toothpaste has managed to rope in Saif Ali Khan to endorse their products. Though Saif's career has seen lots of ups and downs, he came back in a big way with Farhan Akhtar's *Dil Chahta Hai*. His popularity with the youth has only increased with films like *Hum Tum*, *Kal Ho Naa Ho* and most recently *Salaam Namaste*. Saif's image is that of a hip-urban youth and his qualities complement the brand's attributes. Saif's association with the brand will certainly benefit it. It is said that he may be a part of the campaign for Colgate Gel, as well. With Saif being Gen-X's favourite, he seems like the ideal choice for the brand.

Source: Internet

Javier Bardem

An actor true to his art

Javier Bardem possesses a chameleon-like ability to disappear into his characters, which frequently renders him unrecognisable save for his piercing eyes. Given his family's long history in show business, it's no wonder that Javier Bardem chose to pursue a career as an actor. Always hesitant to play the same type of character twice, each role is a transformation that occurs both mentally and physically. Bardem's hesitance to embrace celebrity culture and make a conscious effort to break into the American market has only served to make him more alluring to stateside filmmakers.

Born the youngest member of a family of actors in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, Spain, in 1969, Bardem's first role came at the age of six with the film *El Picaro* (aka *The Scoundrel*). Bardem was a shy boy who immediately took to acting. Numerous television roles as well as a stint touring with an independent theatre company found the young rugby enthusiast increasingly dedicated to the stage. An interest in painting led Bardem to study at Madrid's Escuela de Artes y Oficios, but following a series of odd jobs and the realisation that he would never develop the skills to become a great artist, he eventually drifted back into acting.

Moving into the 1990s, Bardem's collaborations with such filmmakers as Pedro Almodóvar (*High Heels* in 1991 and *Live Flesh* in 1997) and JJ Bigas Luna (*Jamón Jamón* in 1992 and *Huevos de Oro* in 1994) found his popularity as a Spanish screen star growing. Goya-nominated for his



performances in both *Jamón Jamón* and *Huevos de Oro*, Bardem took home the award for his roles in *Días Contados* (1994) and *Boca a Boca* (1995), and it was becoming increasingly clear that a formidable international talent was emerging. A turning point in Bardem's career came with the release of 2000's *Before Night Falls*. A thoughtful look at the life of Cuban poet and novelist Reinaldo Arenas, Bardem took over the role after Benicio Del Toro abandoned it,

and his physical transformation stunned audiences worldwide. Arenas was an ultimately tragic figure who eventually committed suicide while living in poverty in New York City. Bardem prepared tirelessly for the role by changing his diet, immersing himself in Arenas' works, traveling to Cuba to speak with those who knew the writer personally and to learn the Cuban dialect. In addition to drawing the actor international accolades, the role also found Bardem making

history as the first Spanish actor ever to be nominated for an Academy Award.

Though the offers came flooding in following the success of *Before Night Falls*, Bardem remained steadfast in his resistance to the Hollywood system. Turning down roles in such blockbusters as *The World is Not Enough*, it became increasingly obvious that Bardem was indeed sincere in his intentions to remain thoughtful about his career choices. Following his role in actor John Malkovich's directorial debut, *The Dancer Upstairs* (2002), Bardem's role as an unemployed dockworker in Fernando León de Aranoa's *Mondays in the Sun* (also 2002) again found the actor drawing praise. Though the film ultimately didn't take home the Oscar for Best Foreign Film, it did net Bardem another Best Lead Actor 'Goya' in addition to being voted Best Film at the awards.

The actor's most recent triumph: writer-director Alejandro Amenabar's *The Sea Inside/Mar Adentro* (2004). In the movie, Bardem played Ramon Sampedro, a quadriplegic bedridden for over 25 years who begins passionately lobbying for the right to end his life, despite the protests of his family, friends and the local authorities. His absorbing, brilliantly believable performance formed the centerpiece of a challenging, emotionally involving film built on a thorny moral issue.

Bardem continues to be an enduring figure in the world of films.

Compiled by Cultural Correspondent