

Cinema and the Liberation War

A discussion session

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

THE Cultural Wing of Biswa Shahitya Kendra arranged a discussion session on December 21. The topic for discussion by renowned filmmaker Tareque Masud was Cinema and the Liberation War.

Giving a few examples, Masud critically analysed the positive and negative sides in the portrayal of our Liberation War in cinema. To quote Masud, "Set against the backdrop of our freedom movement, movies were made in post-Liberation War Bangladesh."

Talking about some milestones in Bangladeshi film, Masud said, "Film exponent Zahir Raihan made *Jibon Theke Neya*, overcoming the hurdles created by the then

Pakistani military rulers. He made his popular documentary *Stop Genocide* during our Liberation War. In the process, Zahir not only concentrated on the genocide by the Pakistani military during our freedom movement but also lampooned all the genocides that took place worldwide. Besides this, *Arunadoyer Agnishakkhi* and *Dhire Bohe Meghna* are examples of quality movies on our Liberation War.

"It is not necessary for war scenes to be the sole topic of movies on the Liberation War. Through narrative, the Liberation War can be portrayed with a unique aesthetic presentation."

In response to questions from the audience, Masud outlined the limitations of making quality movies

on the freedom movement. He said, "Films are considered an industry all over the world, but when it comes to bank loans films are not viewed from a commercial aspect."

Besides technical limitations, Masud thinks that filmmakers in our country have a few other barriers. There is a time constraint to begin with due to limited budgets. On movies based on our Liberation War, the director says, "We should try to portray the Liberation War from different, interesting dimensions."

Amongst the audience, actor Al Mansur and Professor CR Abrar shared their views on the topic.

Indigenous art forms in urban theatre

In conversation with Professor Syed Jamil Ahmed



Professor Syed Jamil Ahmed

ERSHAD KAMOL

Before the 1980s our urban theatre, derived from the British colonial ethos, was totally influenced by the western theatre concept. However, today the scene has changed and indigenous performing art forms such as *Pala gaan*, *Gazir gaan* and others have come to the fore. One of the masterminds of this trend is Professor of Dhaka University, Syed Jamil Ahmed. His aim is to incorporate indigenous performing art forms in urban theatre. The result? A 'national theatre idiom' rooted in its indigenous traditions, which can effectively reflect the hopes, dreams and aspirations of our compatriots.

Jamil set the ball rolling for this goal from the 1980s. Along the way he brought about a dynamic change in the set and light designs of our theatre and initiated several workshops with different troupes to promote quality theatre. In plays directed by him, such as *Chaka* (a Dhaka Theatre production), *Bishad Shindhu* (a Dhaka Padatik production), *Kamala Ranir Sagardighi* and *Behular Bhashan* (two productions of the Theatre and Music Department, University of Dhaka), viewers got the essence of the indigenous style of narration on urban stage. Syed Jamil Ahmed is

also the author of *Achinpakhli Infinity: Indigenous Theatre of Bangladesh*, a book considered to be the most authentic and elaborated documentation of the indigenous performing art forms in our country.

What made Jamil contemplate applying the indigenous performing art forms in urban theatre? According to him, "I began to think about the 'national theatre' concept in the mid-'70s, while I was a student of the National School of Drama (NSD), New Delhi. There I saw BV Karanth, Bansi Kaul and Habib Tanvir devising performances aimed at forging an 'Indian identity' in their theatre arena. They worked on indigenous performances and developed a theatre form parallel to 'European Theatre'. I was really fascinated by Bansi's work."

"That motivated me and after I returned to Bangladesh, I tried to develop our own theatre concept. It was in 1979 and Dhaka Theatre in those days was busy with their production, *Shakuntala*. I remember urging Selim Al Deen, Nasiruddin Yousuff and SM Mohsin to work towards creating an itinerant troupe with a repertoire of plays devised in a manner similar to the Jatra and tour Bangladesh. In those days I had a misconception that Jatra was the only existing indigenous performing art form in Bangladesh. Today, this idea seems extremely naïve, but 25 years ago none of us had a clear conception of the indigenous theatre of Bangladesh and how to apply techniques drawn from it. The itinerant troupe never materialised, but when Selim Al Deen wrote *Kittankhola* (1981), we began to experiment with the indigenous performing art forms.

"In 1986 Dhaka Theatre arranged a workshop-based production on *Gazir gaan*, which I directed. Along with Afsar Ahmed and Salim al-Deen, I went to a village in Manikganj (actually Afsar's home) and began to work with a *Gazir gaan* troupe led by Hakim Ali. Later, we worked extensively at the Jahangirnagar University. We redesigned the performance space

and the costume, edited the text and attempted to re-articulate the performance of the lead-narrator. This re-devised *Gazir gaan* was presented at the Mahila Samity Stage but it was a complete failure. Neither did the text have any contemporary relevance nor could I re-articulate the technique of narrative acting effectively.

"When I went to the USA on a Fulbright fellowship in 1990, I had fruitful interactions with Danny Patridge, an ex-member of the San Francisco Mime Group, who had conducted two workshops in Bangladesh prior to my visit. I remember Salim al-Deen requesting me to carry his play *Chaka* with me. Dhaka Theatre rejected the play on grounds that it was difficult to enact on stage as it was entirely in a narrative form. At the Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, I translated the *Chaka* as *The Wheel* and jointly directed it with Danny. It was during the rehearsals that Danny showed me the techniques of narrative acting. The key factors are communion with the spectators and avoiding 'blank space' during performance while transforming from one character to another", adds Jamil.

Jamil has conducted extensive fieldwork on the indigenous performing art forms at the grass-root level, which he considers as the backbone of his directorial strength.

Asked about the difference between the performances of rural artists and that of urban theatre actors, Jamil says, "The rural performers are more communicative than the urban performers. The rural artists often do not work with written scripts. They improvise quite extensively during performance and the improvisations focus on contemporary issues and needs of the spectators. As a result, their performances are infused with more spontaneity. Urban performers have to work with a written script and the devised performance leaves little or no provision for improvisation."

Jamil believes in praxis, in a manner that theory and practice

interact with each other dialectically. "Theory without practice may only be verbalisation and practice without theory can end in mere activism. Instead of seeking 'authentic' indigenous theatre of Bangladesh, one should be bold enough to recognise that boundaries and categories are futile.

As for the 'national theatre idiom' of Bangladesh, one must not forget that it should include the identity of all the ethnic communities living in

this country. Taking into account the problematic notion of 'nation', all the bitter memories that the Bangla-speaking ethnic community has inscribed on the other ethnic communities such as Santhals, Garos, Chakmas, one should nevertheless strive to work towards a distinct identity that embraces the entire humanity".

Group Theatre festival, chittagong Shyama Prem to be staged today



Prangone Mor, a theatre troupe from Dhaka, will stage their current production, *Shyama Prem* today at Shilpakala Academy, Chittagong. Prangone Mor is the only troupe from Dhaka participating in the drama festival. Chittaranjan Ghosh has adapted

the play *Shyama Prem* from Rabindranath Tagore's dance drama *Shyama*, which deals with love, humanism and the urge for ultimate freedom. Ananta Hira directs *Shyama Prem*, to be staged at 7 pm today.



Tareque Masud speaks at the discussion

PHOTO: STAR

Cross-current

Tinni and Shahed pair up for the first time

Popular TV actress and model Tinni is pairing up with Shahed for the first time in *Durer Jibon*. Scripted by Artrika Rosy and directed by Chayanika Chowdhury, *Durer Jibon* is about a fashion designer Adnan, engaged to Rinika, who is also studying on fashion designing. After graduating with good grades, Rinika looks for a job and lands a reasonable one.

However, after their engagement, both Rinika and Adnan apply for a job in Canada. Rinika's design is selected by the overseas agency and she is asked to move to Canada. After much soul searching and debates with both Adnan and her mother, Rinika decides to take up the job. Two days before her departure, it is revealed that Adnan has leukaemia.

Will she emotionally detach herself from her loved ones for the sake of her career? Apart from Shahed and Tinni in the central characters, the play also features Sharmili Ahmed, Shishir Kona and Dibyojyoti. *Durer Jibon* will be aired on RTV December 30 at 8:15 pm. Incidentally, RTV makes its debut on December 26.



Tinni and Shahed in the play *Durer Jibon*

Lux-Channel-i Performance Award- 2004



Purnima and Reaz performing at the event

Lux-Channel-i Performance Award- 2004 was announced recently at Sharjah. Fifty-five nominated artistes in 19 different categories went to Sharjah for the awards.

The winners of the competition are: Director Humayun Ahmed for his movie *Shyamol Chhaya*, Director (drama) Mostafa Sarwa Farooki, actress Purnima for the film *Megher Pore Megh*, most talked about actress in film Moushumi for her performance in the film *Khairun Shudoni*, actors Manna for *Uttarer Khep* and Ferdous for *Bachelor* - most talked about film actor Hasan Masud, playback singers Subir Nandi and Sabina Yasmin, TV actress Srabonti for the drama serial *Ekannobori*, most talked about TV actress Eishita, TV actor Tauqir Ahmed, most talked about TV actor Fazlur Rahman Babu, singers Momotaz and Kumar Bishwajit, news casters Apu Mahfuz and Mishu Rahman best models Mahfuz and best band LRB.

A colourful live show was presented by the artistes at the award giving ceremony. Another attraction of the event was the participation of a Sharjah-based dance troupe with the Bangladeshi artistes. Afzal Hossain was the anchor of the award giving ceremony.

Channel-i will telecast the recorded programme on December 29 and 30 at 7:30 pm.

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Ripped from the roots...

Jatra's endeavour to uphold folk songs

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

What are we without our roots? It's important to reflect on this at a moment when our cultural roots are threatened.

The practice of an art keeps it alive. The artistes who practice it are equally important as the art itself. Certain art forms that are unique to our culture make us what we are, different from other communities of the world. They make us Bangalees. *Baul* music is such an art that is very unique to our culture. It's a form of folk music that talks about spirituality, love and God and they come straight from the hearts of the village dwellers of our country. The musicians who follow this philosophy are called *Bauls*. These artistes have indefatigably contributed to the enrichment of our Bangalee culture over the centuries.

Public performance is the only way of making a living for these artistes but due to recent political and social unrest, these artistes are reluctant to perform in public. Hence thousands of family members of these artistes are caught in the mire of poverty.

Over recent years, band musicians in Bangladesh, such as *Bangla*, have earned enormous support from the fans of Bangla rock-folk fusion for promoting our folk music. Two of the band members, Buno and Anushey, own the home decoration and handicrafts store, *Jatra*



Folk artistes performing at Jatra

located at Banani, Dhaka. As a part of their efforts to promote Bangla folk musicians and uphold the *Baul* culture, *Jatra* hosts folk musicians performing live indoors, everyday between 4:30pm and 7:30pm.

TANIA AHMED

First-day-shooting experience

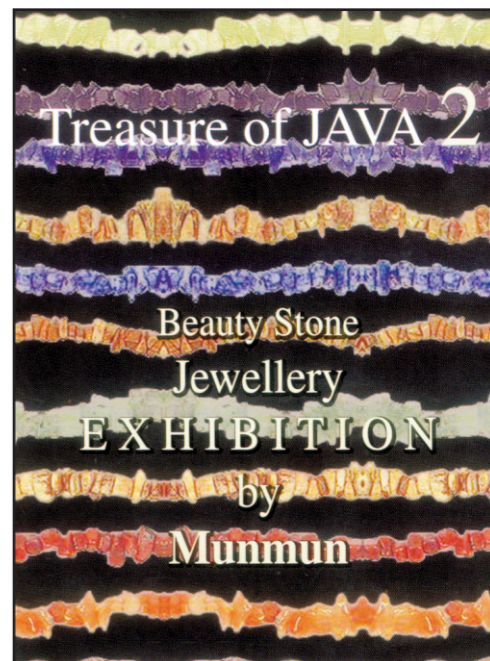


Tania Ahmed

Back in the 90s, when I first faced the camera as a model, camera phobia is the last thing I assumed I might have. The shooting took place at the Moghbazar branch of Aarong, where the director was Afzal Hossain Bulu was operating the camera. There were other models who were also new in the scene.

When I peeped through a door, according to the script, everybody seemed to like my style and performance. The shot was okayed in one take. A well-known actress was shooting for another TV play nearby. But somehow, she could not perform appropriately. Cameraman Bulu scolded the actress saying, "Why can't you do this simple thing while a new comer like Tania has done her job so perfectly?"

For me that was special, as I was just stepping into the showbiz.



A two-day long exhibition of stones, titled *Treasure of Java 2* will be held at WVA Auditorium, Dhanmondi, starting from December 24. Eminent poet, architect and art critic Rabiul Husain will inaugurate the exhibit. The exhibition will be open everyday from 11:00 am to 8:00 pm.

Songs of the yesteryears to be performed at Srijon's programme

Cultural organisation Srijon is holding a musical soiree of old Bangla songs on December 24 at 6:05 pm at Poet Sufia Kamal Auditorium, National Museum, says a press release. Srijon holds similar musical programmes every month by established and emerging artistes.

The aim of these programmes by Srijon is to mainly uphold our cultural heritage and catch the attention of the younger generation.