

The pulsating beats of Bangla Dhol

SADYA AFREEN MALICK

REMEMBER the timeless song of Sachin Dev Burman *Tak dum tak dum bajai Bangladesh-er dhol--?* Even at the pinnacle of his glory, the folk maestro yearned for the *Bangla dhol*, when he moved to Bombay from Comilla. He found no alternative to the *Bangla dhol* as accompaniment to his timeless compositions. *Bangla dhol* is a must have instrument in folk songs such as *Jari*, *Shari* and *Kobi Gaan* for ages. "It is quite different as compared to the *dhols* played in West Bengal during puja festivals," says Md Nazrul Islam, a widely travelled and accomplished *dhuli* (dhol player) of the country. During *Chaitra*, the last month of the Bangla year, *dhulis* all across the country wake up from a cultural hibernation. Although the year round they perform at various gatherings, *Pahela Baishakh* is always the busiest and they are booked by cultural organisations three months in advance. "With the first few strokes in the *dhol* echoing through the sleepy villages, the entire suburb would spring to life. The young brides' would peek from behind the bamboo partitions as their *nath* (nose-rings) swayed with the rhythm. The beat

matched my pulsating heart," says a smiling Nazrul. "Alauddin Alam (my uncle) was adept in playing 10 *dhols* simultaneously at the village concerts and was revered by his peers. I aspired to emulate him and trained under him." Shortly, young Nazrul became a popular figure at the village concerts too. But he was destined to go beyond his village boundaries and soon accompanied folk singer Khorshed Alam Boyatee to perform at the High Court Shrine premises in Dhaka during early 90s. With the energetic performance of *dhol* and the swinging of locks he performed to a paying audience. "The enthusiastic crowd would often shower *bakhshish* ranging to Tk 1000 that exceeded my daily pay of a meager Tk 100." Every evening Nazrul's performance would attract a sizable audience when one day Hanif Sanket, of *Ityadi* fame introduced him to the electronic media. Nazrul has rough statistics on the number of *dhol* players in the country. "I, myself assembled a total of 100 *dhulis* from across the country for the TV show *Ityadi*." With the *Bangla dhol* tied by a *gamcha* slung across the shoulders, Nazrul was soon invited to several music festivals in India, US, UK, Switzerland and more. He performed at

the Bangladesh Folk Festival, in presence of the British Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1997. At the recent SAARC summit, Nazrul gave his enlivening performance of *Bangla dhol* with other folk instrumentalists on *dotara*, *ektara* and *Shanai*. Covered with striking shades in velvet, the instrument is made from the bark of mango trees with goat hide placed on both sides and fixed with a metal rim. Cowhide is used as *doyali* to tighten the skin for variation in sound effect and scale, adds Nazrul. "During our first visit to New York, in the absence of any sponsor, we put up posters at important venues by ourselves. Many ridiculed us by saying that it would not work. However, the following day the show was a smashing success and we performed till daybreak. At a point it was difficult to stand and perform, since the stage was dotted with dollar bills. I was exhausted when we finally wrapped up. After the programme the ecstatic crowd presented me with a garland made from currency notes too. I felt like a king," says a gleaming Nazrul. Dressed in *gerua lungi* and *fatua*, the talented *dhuli* Nazrul is a symbol of our folk culture crossing all boundaries. His skillful presentation generates magical variations with the beat that goes *Gheyur Ghina Gij-*



Colourful masks made for this year's rally (L), a view of the parade (file photo)

The carnival of life

Gearing up for IFA's colourful rally

KARIM WAHEED

The planning begins about a month before *Pahela Baishakh* (Bangla New Year); enthusiastic workers slog at it for two weeks. The Institute of Fine Arts (IFA) aka 'Charukala' buzzes with activity 24/7 for that period. Life-size replicas of birds, animals and other motifs start taking shape, flamboyant masks adorn the classrooms and dazzle the onlookers. The activities often continue right till early morning, *Pahela Baishakh*. The preparations are for the parade that starts off from the IFA premises and goes around Dhaka University campus. One of the major attractions of *Baishakhi* celebration, the parade has become an icon in our country. The replicas of different shapes and designs take longer to make than the masks. First the frame is made with bamboo; often straw is used to stuff the

structure. Paper is then pasted on the frame, separate parts (wings, tails for example) are attached. The replicas are then painted or coloured papers are used. This year the parade will feature birds, horses and cages. Masks, made with paper and paper-maché, are other attractions. Bright colours are used to finish off the masks. Tigers, lions, rabbits and more -- the masks are a visual delight. However, as delightful as the stunning masks and replicas are, there is the issue of funds. A parade of this magnitude costs a pretty penny. Big shot brand names have been sponsoring the arrangements for the last few years. This year, however, students and teachers of IFA decided that they do not need sponsors. Why? The common sentiment is that the rally is part of the mass *Baishakhi* celebration and should not be commercialised.

How the funds were generated is an inspiring phenomenon indeed. Students sold beautiful *shora* (clay pots) and paintings while artworks by renowned artists (teachers and ex-students of IFA) were auctioned at the Zainul Gallery. The *shoras* featuring rural motifs, human and animals faces were sold at a price range of Tk 200-500. Paintings by the students were priced in the same range. The subjects were varied, ranging from skate-boarders to *rakhal balok* (youngster tending cattle) riding an ox. Other themes include fishing, traditional boats of Bengal, cranes, human faces and nature. The paintings, woodwork, clay figurines and more, auctioned at the Zainul Gallery began from Taka 5,000 and went up to Taka 25,000. Dr Farida Zaman's *Amar Bhalobasha* in the beginning of

the line-up is eye-catching; the blazing shades of orange and crimson capture the essence of the season *Grishmo* (summer). Jamal Ahmed's *Bahomaan Nodi* highlights rural people still making a living of string-pulling boats from the riverside. Shishir Bhattacharya's untitled work displaying a mermaid, an owl, a tiger, a snake and a human with the head of a bird, fish scales and stretching roots from the hands, is intriguing. All these endeavors, a labour of love, will culminate today with the parade; a parade that has become a fête of the urban masses -- young and old. Here's hoping the dazzling hues and unconstrained energy will diminish the weariness of the year gone by and usher in a promising new year.



Dhuli Md Nazrul Islam entranced in the rhythm.



ghinata ghineta --- kur kur kur... and the audience has little option but to dance along. Early morning on *Pahela Baishakh*, *dhuli* Nazrul and his contemporaries will team up at different venues. The popular folk singers Momotaj, Poresh Ali Boyatee, Rojob Ali, Gazi Dewan Boyatee, Makhon Dewan, Abul Sarkar or even fusion singer Anushey's presentation without the *Bangla dhols* as accompaniment would be similar to "flames without blaze". So, let the overwhelming beats of *Bangla dhol* engulf your senses as you catch up with the various cultural programmes held all around the cities as well as distant villages. Let the sounds of *dhol* herald a joyous year. This will be a boost to the folk artists for their undying passion: 'cause not all are as fortunate as Nazrul.

PHOTO: AMIRAN HOSSAIN

Baishakhi celebrations

To celebrate *Pahela Baishakh*, cultural organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes in different venues throughout the city. Here's a run down of some of the major events: **Chhayanaut's** cultural programme

at Ramna Botomul at 6am. **Charukala** (Dhaka University) at 7am. Cultural show, quiz contest, colourful *Baishakhi* rally by **Department of Architecture**, BUET at 9am. Cultural show by **Wrishiz Shiba Goshthi** at Shahbug Shishu Park

at 7am. *Baishakhi Mela* at **Dhaka Sheraton Hotel** at 7am. *Pahela Baishakh* celebration programme at **Hotel Purbani International**, Atrium Lounge at 12pm. *Baishakhi* Festival at Gulshan Play-

ground, behind Wonderland organised by **Bengal Foundation today and tomorrow**. *Baul Mela* by **Polli Baul Shamaj Unnayan Sangstha** (PBSUS) at Engineers' Institute, Dhaka at 8am.

A REPLICA IN THE MAKING



PHOTO: SHAWKAT JAMIL