Over the years the influx of the candidates has mounted. "We have received a petition of five hundred parents from the Mirpur area who are pressing for opening a new branch over there. We have plans to expand from the next session. In fact our plan includes two new branches of BAFA, -- one in Mirpur and another in Uttara," Chowdhury points out.

Sadly the government's financial assistance to BAFA is scanty. "We don't get much attention as does Shilpakala Academy, But our effort is not negligible. What I regret is that we cannot run courses of *sitar* or *eshraj* because of a dearth of teachers. Shilpakala can afford to run such courses, but they remain unrelenting to such demands. It is not only financial and logistic constraints that keep us from introducing courses in *sitar* or *eshraj*, space is also a big concern for BAFA," says Chowdhury.

As for private patronisation, BAFA has failed to involve the business community in many occasions. "There was an occasion when our artists had an offer to stage programmes in the USA. But, since we failed to raise the passage money, the programmes were cancelled. I literally went door to door with the hope that the corporate giants would extend their support, but I failed to raise the much needed passage money," laments Chowdhury who feels that the artists were better off in the olden days. "There were *zamindars* who used to patronise them," adds Chowdhury.

It is interesting to notice that while there is an absence of patrons, there has been a rise in the number of pupils who want to cultivate their talent in arts. And it is in BAFA that the ones who are able to show their acumen in their respective fields are given the chance to participate in state-level functions. "There once was a time when BAFA



It is the competence of teachers on which rests BAFA's reputation.

Bulbul Chowdhury: the Doyen of the Dance World

Bulbul Chowdhury was a dancer with a difference. It is for his innovations as well as perseverance that he is ranked with the likes of Uday Shankar, the outstanding Indian dancer. He was born in Bogra, where his father used to work. His father, Md Ajim Ullah, hailed from Satkania, Chittagong. It was in 1834, in a school at Manikganj, that Bulbul first had the chance to perform a dance called "Chatak dance". The first attempt was received with much enthusiasm on the part of the audience. Since the beginning of 1936 Bulbul started to perform on a regular basis. His ability to articulate a vision and his knack for appropriating both classical dance and the postures of the fishermen, snake charmers, and peasants engaged in their everyday activities have earned him a unique place in the domain of art. The Kolkata based newspapers of the period testified how he touched the audience with his innovative blend of classicism with modern day techniques.

After partition of India in 1947, Bulbul faced a hostile environment in the then East Pakistan. It is at this point that twofold problems faced him, one of rearing of talents who could accompany him in his dances, and the other of religious conservatism that stood against his effort to stage dance dramas throughout the country. However, he successfully continued his practice and even came to the notice of the people at the helm of the Pakistan government. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan once described him as the cultural ambassador of Pakistan.

Bulbul's life summarily ended in May 17, 1954. What he left behind was a body of work that consisted of dance dramas composed by him and performances of renowned dance dramas that he considered to be the inheritance of his own people, to whom he connected through his art.

It is his life's work that inspired Begum Rana Liaquat Ali, the first president of BAFA, and Mahmud Nurul Huda, the first Secretary of BAFA, with AK Fazlul Haq as the chairman and Hossain Shahid Surwardy as a patron that this institute that bears the name of Bulbul was launched. There were many other socialites as well as artists whose dedication made the launching of BAFA possible in a climate where there was strong opposition to cultural practices.