# The Season of Colours

SULTANA YASMIN



BAISHAKH is a month that symbolises prosperity and the beginning of great tidings. Everyone wishes to shake off the previous years gloom and get prepared to face some more of it in the New Year albeit with renewed vigour. Baishakh brings with it a whole new flurry of festivities among which pickle making reigns supreme.

### Invitation in red

Taxes are as popular as a crooked backstabbing politician among common people. That's mainly because both are often interrelated. In our culture taxes started around the rule of Samrat Akbar when farmers and the common people would have to pay their hard earned wealth on the first day of Baishakh. The tradition was to open a new account book every year wrapped in a blood red cover. You can draw your own conclusions as to the colour and the bleeding pain of parting with the money.

This particular red book was known as 'haalkhaata'. Later this trend was adopted by the noblemen and other influential people who turned this tax collection into a festivity. It would be a joyous occasion for those on the collecting side. Invitations were sent out on red cards. Such a tradition is still maintained to a very small degree by mostly sweet, gold and cloth merchants. Their red bound account book contains the transactions of the past year.

### Clay horses and pink clouds

It's also a very hectic period for the craftsmen and women from the various districts of the country. These artisans are busy day and night creating clay pottery, toys, jugs such as our traditional 'kolshi', utensils and of course the animals like elephants, horses and tigers. All these are often adorned with highly decorative paintwork.

Other items being used for such creative purposes include palm leaves to make fans, ornamental boxes, mats etc. Those skilled with jute create a variety of bags, mats, wall hangings and other decoration items.

Let's not forget the people who are busy preparing the various treats for the taste buds. How can you have such colourful festivals without billowing pink clouds of candyfloss? All this is often set up using money collected as loan. Despite the acute financial conditions tradition plays a big part in bringing out the varied hues of the season.

### The sound of music

Chhayanaught performances at Ramna's Botomul have become an essential feature of the Bangla New Year celebrations. The first day of Baishakh begins with people getting up as early as possible in the morning attired in new Baishakhi saris and panjabis to go to Ramna Park to enjoy the songs, dances and recitations.

Chhayanaught started way back in 1967 although it was established in 1961. It was postponed for one year in 1971 during the liberation war. From 1972 till now Chhayanaught has performed their various cultural programmes uninterrupted except in 2001 when bomb blasts killed and maimed people, marring the celebrations. Chhayanaught's very own artists who practice tirelessly for weeks before the event perform the whole programme.

### Palette full of colours

The school of colours cannot help but participate extensively in the season of colours. Charukola always brings out a wild and colourful rally every year in celebration of the new year. Work is already underway in creating exquisitely made papier-mâché masks depicting tigers, lions, birds and every imaginable creature as well as a few abstract scary pieces. These will be carried aloft throughout a rally. Others are busy painting the town red as well as every other colour in the spectrum drawing murals on the city walls. These depict everything from scenes of nature to those from our daily lives. People step out of the Chhayanaught function to join in the Charukola activities.

The festivities here are always based upon a popular cultural event or subject. Previous rallies have seen doves as symbols of peace and cobras depicting the dangerous nature of our political environment.

People from all walks of life contribute to make this day a special beginning. There are those who work hard to bring out the festivities and it's up to the rest of the people to make it worth all the effort by simply visiting and participating with an open heart.

*Translated by **Ehsanur Raza Ronny***