

Up Close

"There is no ingenuity in our current films" -- Riaz

MAHMUDA AFROZ

DASHING, charming, sporty, charismatic, academically brilliant -- several adjectives can be dedicated to Riaz, who has been one of the leading actors in Bangladeshi cinema for 10 years now.

Born and brought up in the CNB staff quarters of Faridpur, Riaz had never in his wildest dreams imagined he would become a heartthrob to millions of people in the country. Interestingly, back in those days he would go to other peoples' houses to watch the popular TV show *Tarzan* and Bengali feature films. *Tarzan* made a huge impact on young Riaz. Eventually when he grew up, Tom Cruise's character in the Hollywood blockbuster *Top Gun* replaced *Tarzan*.

It seems that Riaz was not far from achieving his dreams when he cleared the exams for being a pilot right after his HSC results. From then on it was smooth sailing for this athlete, as he became a top-rate fighter pilot. He went under training in Turkey on a scholarship for one and half years. "Good old days," reminisces Riaz. However, he was later dismissed from the Air Force due to a misunderstanding with the authority.

Inspired by his cousin Babita, one of the leading ladies in film of the country, Riaz turned to acting. Youngest among eight siblings, Riaz's mother was against her son joining the film industry. "My mother is a religious person and



“The sacrifices, the hurt, the blood, sweat and tears -- at times I wonder whether it's all worth it”

she has been against me working in films from day one. That stance hasn't changed," confesses Riaz.

Riaz feels that after being in the film industry for 10 years he has not done anything worth writing home about. "We lack in all fields whether it's scripts, production, direction or technical side. There is no ingenuity in our current films. I feel the state of our cinema is stagnant. As actors we are stuck doing the same roles over and over again." In Riaz's opinion, compared to the Indian film industry, Bangladesh is far behind. "They have a large local and international market and a diverse target group compared to Bangladesh. Hence they can afford experimenting and making different kinds of movies."

Riaz in partnership with Tuhin Barua has a production house called Pathika. They have produced their first movie *Hridoyer Kotha*. "This movie is close to my heart. It is yet to be released and I don't know how the audience will receive it," admits this talented actor who also wants to move towards direction some day.

Riaz describes himself as a God-loving simple man who loves all of creation. While this 'scorpio' does not believe he is the ace actor in the country, he is still thankful to the Lord for the position he is in today. However, the sacrifices he has had to make in his family and personal life have been big he admits. "The sacrifices, the hurt, the blood, sweat and tears -- at times I wonder whether it's all worth it," concludes Riaz.

TV Watch

Special programmes on Tagore's death anniversary on channel i

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

To mark Rabindranath Tagore's 65th death anniversary on August 6, Channel i will telecast special programmes. The channel will feature musical programmes, talk shows, special plays and dance programmes. The focus will be on Tagore's works and life.

**Akash Bhora Shurjotara**  
Dr Arup Ratan Chowdhury will render popular Tagore songs at 8:05 am.

**Nana Ronger Rabindranath**  
This programme from the Channel i archive, focuses on Tagore's life and works and will be telecast at 8:30 am.

**Grameen Phone Tritiyo Matra**  
A special episode on Rabindranath will be telecast at 9:45 am.

**Rabindranather Gaan-e Nari**  
Directed by Annaya Ruma, a special programme titled *Rabindra-nather Gaaney Nari* is scheduled to be telecast at 12:05 pm. Sadi Mohammad and Lily Islam will participate in the programme. Rokeya Prachi will host the programme.

**Shorashori Rabindranath**  
Channel i will air the programme from Bishwa Shahitya Kendra live, to mark the 65th death anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore at 2:40 pm. Popular singers Rezwana Chowdhury Banya, Sadi Mohammed, Mohibuzzaman Chowdhury,



A scene from *Shubha* (top), (L-R) Rokeya Prachi, Sadi Mohammad and Lily Islam in *Rabindranather Gaaney Nari*

Laisa Ahmed Lisa will render Tagore's songs. Kazi Arif and Joyanto Chattapadhyay will recite poems. Poet Asad Chowdhury will host the programme.

**Jol Porey Pata Norey**  
A special programme for children, *Jol Porey Pata Norey* will be telecast at 5:30 pm. Child artistes will perform dance, recitation and music. Short documentary *Rabindranather Kuthibari* will also be telecast.

**TVplay 'Shubha'**  
Based on Rabindranath Tagore's story, the play *Shubha* will be telecast at 7:50pm. Directed by Abul Hayat, the play features Tisha, Maznun Mizan, Ferdousi Ahmed

Lina and others in lead roles.

**Nabin Anonday**  
A special solo musical programme *Nabin Anonday*, directed by Khalid Mahmud Mithu will be telecast at 9:35 pm. Renowned Tagore song artiste Rezwana Chowdhury Banya will perform in the programme.

**Rabindra Path**  
This special programme is scheduled to be telecast at 10:00pm. Eminent literary personalities, poet Shamsur Rahman, Momtaz Uddin Ahmed, poet Nirmalendu Goun and Abdullah Abu Sayeed will take part in the programme.

Palagaan at Bengal Shilpalaya  
A secular narrative of 'Ramayana'

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Madhab Gonshai and his troupe from the Gopal community of Kustia delighted the Dhaka audience with their performance of *Pala Gaan* (narrative of epics or folklore) on August 2 at Bengal Shilpalaya. Their performance of the *pala*, *Ashwamedh jaggo* from *Ramayana* that narrates the story of Ramchandra, Sita and their two sons -- Lob and Kush, presented a rare opportunity for the city dwellers to celebrate the richness of our cultural heritage.

In the secular performance, the *palakaars* celebrated Ram, a saviour of humankind. The world has seen several avatars like Ram -- appearing in different cultures with different names but with the same purpose; devoting their lives to humanity. Celebrating one of these characters implies celebrating humanity. Madhab and his troupe represented *Ramayana* addressing contemporary issues of the world. Thus, through their narration *Ramayana* becomes contemporary.

The performance began with a musical overture by Madhab Gonshai. It was followed by the main part of the performance rendered by Ram Gonshai along with choral singing and instrumentals by other members of the troupe. Ram Gonshai delivered a non-stop three-hour long performance.

The lead vocalist depicted the mythology in lyrical form. Another singer engaged with Ram Gonshai in a dual performance in the form of a conversation. The performance heightened the effect of songs by rendering a few words and

exchanging dialogues. Ram Gonshai danced along with the singing. Besides narrating the events, he enacted different characters of the epic.

Interspersed with the lyrical passages were sections of improvised prose. In these passages, the vocalist described parts of action accompanied by appropriate gestures and movements.

Occasionally he switched from narrative to dialogues with the help of a group member.

The narrator directly conveyed his thoughts on different contemporary issues especially communalism and secular, humanist values.

The Gopal community of Kustia has been performing different *palas* on *Ramayana* for seven generations. The troupe, comprising six musicians and a lead vocalist, is led by Madhab Gonshai. Madhab Ghonshai plays the harmonium, Shadhan Biswas and Bhajan Biswas are on *khol*, Banku Biswas on *banshi* (bamboo flute), Naswaran Roy on *kortal* and Pradip Adhikari on the key board.

*Palakaars* have been entertaining and educating the masses, mainly the rural population, for generations and their endeavours continue till date. At a time when there is little access for the masses to healthy entertainment, their activities is much needed and appreciated.

Bengal Foundation organised the programme.



The performers during the *pala*

In conversation with Anup Barua  
Current music scenario: Moving ahead or making a U-turn?

KARIM WAHEED

*Jago Kholo Go Ankhi* is perhaps one of the most impressive recent audio productions. The album features the diverse genres in Nazrul songs -- *kabyo geeti, raag pradhan, bhatiyali, Islami and baul* - in all their glory. Music composition is slick, yet true to the roots. With apt use of instruments like *sarangi* and *tabla*, a velvety voice effortlessly flows between highs and lows of the octave; creating a *mahol* (ambience) that is used to describe sub-continental classical music.

The voice belongs to Anup Barua.

Noted composer of West Bengal, Amit Bandyopadhyay was in charge of music direction for *Jago Kholo...* and the album was recorded in Audio Centre, Kolkata. While some argue that "getting the work done" in our neighbouring country is unpatriotic, Anup says, "Just because an artiste is not willing to compromise with the quality of the production, doesn't give anyone the right to unjustly label him/her."

"Our music industry's unhealthy obsession with 'shortcuts' is promoting rampant and mostly inappropriate use of keyboards and synthesisers. This has left the traditional instrumentalists high and dry. Can you find a *sarangi* player in Bangladesh?"

"Our government doesn't offer substantial patronage to these musicians either. Where as, in our neighbouring country, musicians treading the less lucrative path of classical music are encouraged, admired and sponsored by the government and multinational companies."



Anup started his training in classical music under Ustad Nirad Baran Barua in Chittagong. He later went to Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in Delhi and Mumbai on scholarship and received the prestigious 'Sangeet Visharad' degree. Anup is currently training in *Kirana Gharana* (one of the major traditions in *Hindustani Khayal*) under Ustad

Mashqur Ali Khan.

The singer has also taken up teaching as a profession. Anup has been teaching classical music at Chhayananat since 1998. According to Anup, he is attached to the institution because it imbibes a strong sense of our culture and heritage among its students. He is also a

trainer at Parampara -- conducted by Bengal Foundation.

Anup has worked as one of the trainers in last year's much hyped talent hunt *Closeup 1*. About the experience, however, the singer says, "I was disappointed with the outcome. I felt, we (judges in the preliminary rounds and trainers) were emotionally blackmailed and misled by the organisers into believing we were contributing to something beneficial for our people, our country. Yes to some extent the show has provided a platform for aspiring singers in the country but more so than that, it became a prime medium of mega-exposure for a certain brand."

Anup adds, "To be considered an 'idol', an artiste should have certain standards, skills, education and commitment to his art, besides God-gifted talent. Most of the contestants with potentials were eliminated before the final rounds started. I was infuriated. It ended up becoming a charade, and not an actual talent hunt, which it claimed to be."

"Instead of proclaiming some impressionable aspirant who obviously has miles to go to become an adept singer, as a national idol, the organisers should have taken initiative to provide these youngsters with music lessons at reputable institutions at home or abroad. That would have been the right thing to do and would have made a significant positive impact."

Anup is currently working on his next project -- an album of *adhunika* (contemporary) songs composed by him. Hopefully the committed artiste's endeavours will be appreciated.

'Omikara': An 'Othello' in Uttar Pradesh

When one decides to adapt anything by William Shakespeare, a lot of courage is needed. Tales that have been told and retold in all known corners of the globe for over 400 years calls for that kind of courage.

Vishal Bhardwaj is certifiably a courageous man. Apart from taking control as the director of *Omikara* -- his much-publicised and flaunted adaptation of *Othello* -- Bhardwaj has written the screenplay and dialogues, and also composed the music.

There are no changes in the play's structure. In the original, Othello elopes with the fair Desdemona. Convinced by his wicked aide Iago that she has been having an affair with his lieutenant Cassio, he murders her. When Iago's wife Emilia reveals that Desdemona's affair was faked, she is murdered by her husband while Othello kills himself.

Bhardwaj's version takes the same players and situations, but sets them in Uttar Pradesh. He gives his characters names that either begin with the same letter as the originals, or sound like those names. Then, with a few tweaks to the plot, he makes the story his own.

In a nutshell, *Omikara* Shukla (Ajay Devgan) is a revered chieftain of a gang of outlaws. Prominent among the members of his group are the wily Ishwar 'Langda' Tyagi

(Saif Ali Khan) and lively Keshav Upadhyay or Kesu (Vivek Oberoi).

When Kesu is appointed chief lieutenant to Omikara, Langda jealously decides to involve Omikara's fiancée Dolly Mishra (Kareena Kapoor) in an illicit affair with Kesu, with the help of a little insinuation and a great deal of lies. The consequences are, of course, tragic. By the time Omikara realises his mistake, it is too late.

Bhardwaj's Othello-Omikara is less trusting, his Iago-Tyagi, more wily. The dialect obviously helps recreate what is familiar territory for most readers, but it is the choice of characters that really helps make this a new experience. It takes them from their established milieu and sets them down in strange terrain.

As a man stricken, in turns, by jealousy and love, Ajay Devgan is admirable. Saif and Kareena prove they really need a good director to shine; their potential has been aptly used in the film. Konkona Sen Sharma, who plays Langda's wife Indu, is her usual efficient self, as is Naseeruddin Shah in his role of the politician Bhaisaab.

Bipasha Basu plays a 'nautch girl' (dancer) called Billo Chamanbahar, and displays three dance moves. Vivek Oberoi stands around and smiles.

A classic script always has the power to move the audience, provided it is handled by a director who knows his craft, and actors who understand their job.

Shakespeare would have smiled.

Compiled by Cultural Correspondent



Confessions on the stage

Madonna kicks off European tour

As a band dressed in black revolve across the stage on a moving platform in front of a pop diva on a disco crucifix singing her ballad *Live to Tell* in front of screens displaying gut-wrenching images of African Aids orphans, the only sensible option is to surrender to the whole ludicrous audacity of the Madonna live experience.

Over 59,000 fans turned up to see the show at Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, which was the singer's first ever performance in Wales.

In true Madonna fashion the concert had an edge of controversy as the singer entered the stage riding a saddle and a crucifix.

"Oh my goodness there is so many people. This is very exciting for me."

Concert-goers were also encouraged to consider global issues. "Right now we are living in a world where there's too much hate and too much fighting," she told the audience.

The show ended with a giant video screen asking "Have you confessed?"

Source: Internet

