

Spring and love in the air

‘Pahela Falgun’ Spring gets a subtle welcome in the city

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

TO late risers 6:30am is crack of dawn. Still a little chilly, foliage at Ramna Park still covered in mist. No display of exuberant colours in the urban nature. Doesn't really feel like spring. But hidden somewhere in the greenery a lone *kokil* announces the arrival of Bashonto aka Rituraaj, as labelled by Tagore.

At Bakultala, Charukala (Institute of Fine Arts) premises, members of Jatiyo Bashonto Udjapon Parishad were busy, all set to begin their cultural programme.

On the first day of Falgun (first month of spring in the Bengali calendar), the 'King of seasons' received a warm, rather informal, subtle welcome. Shades of saffron, yellow, orange and red were predominant. City trees may not have adorned themselves with flora but young women certainly did. Flowers were in plenty at the vendors' on the sidewalks. Roses

and *rainigandha* dominate the flower market throughout the year. But perhaps Pahela Falgun is one occasion when marigolds rule the day.

Around 7:00 am artistes were taking the stage; people were filling in the front rows. A big sign on the wall saying "*Phul futuk aar na futuk, aaj Bashonto*" seemed quite appropriate. Stage decoration lacked real flowers but the musicians of Chhayanat kicking off the programme made up for that and more with their delicate harmony. Queue of sitars stirred up a delightful melody, gradually *sarod* chimed in and *tabla* maintained the tempo -- a serene yet vibrant beginning.

A chorus rendition of the familiar Tagore song *Orey bhai falgun legechhey bon-e bon-e*, by artistes of Dhrubotan followed the instrumental performance. Artists also performed *Dokhin haowa*.

Mita Haq rendered *Tumi nabo nabo roop-e esho praney*,

Khayrul Anam Shakil performed *Bashonto elo elo rey*, and young dancers were encouraged by the enthusiastic crowd -- all in all, an enjoyable arrangement to usher in spring. By 8:00 am Charukala premises were teeming.

Bashonto Utshab did miss

Shamsur Rahman and Waheedul Haq. But spring comes regardless of missing familiar faces and though it may not transform the world into a utopia, flowers, colours, music and dance do re-energise the soul. And that is no insignificant feat.

Amar e janmo shohor utchekhhey heshey
Legechhey bashonti rong taar dhushor shottaye aaj...

-- Shamsur Rahman --



Pahela Falgun celebration at Charukala



PHOTO: STAR

Bashonto Utshab vs Valentine's Day

By KAVITA CHARANJI and MAHMUDA AFROZ

There is an air of gaiety and optimism as the first spring breeze sets in after the gloomy winter nights. Welcoming the first day of *Bashonto* (spring) has been a part of our culture for centuries. On the other hand globalisation has bought Valentine's Day to our doorstep. Here is what some of the leading artistes of our country have to say about the two occasions:

Jaya (TV actress): Since childhood, Jaya has seen Pahela Falgun (first day of spring) being celebrated amidst colour and joy. "It is a part of our culture. On the other hand I like the concept of Valentine's Day as well. A special day for love is nice. Amidst our busy life it's just a day to stop, look back and give a little extra time to the ones you love. But I feel closer to Pahela Falgun," she says. If Jaya can manage time she will definitely be dressed in traditional colours and jewellery to welcome spring. "Under our event management company Faisal is organising a party at the Radisson for Valentine's Day, which I hope to attend," she says.

Richi (TV actress): As it was Richi's father's death anniversary, along with her family she went to their hometown -- so no celebrations on Pahela Falgun. "I enjoy Valentine's Day. I know love is not just for a day, it is for everyday. However, it is not everyday that you buy and receive gifts. So it's nice to have a special day," she asserts. Richi's Valentine is in New York and they plan to get married very soon.

Purnima (Film actress): Both Bashonto Utshab and Valentine's

Day are just like any other day for Purnima. In her words, "I will be working on both days. And, believe it or not, I have never celebrated either occasion. I mean I love both the concepts as they both bring joy and happiness and there is a festive air, I enjoy seeing everyone dressed up, but it's just something I have never celebrated."

Aupee (Actress, dancer, talk show host): Aupee's schedule for both the days is similar. She goes to Santa-Mariam University of Creative Technology to teach and after the classes are over, she immerses herself in shooting. To quote her: "Depending on when I wake up and whether I am in a good or bad mood, I will decide whether I will wear a *saree*. I love both the occasions. I see nothing wrong in either, rather it is a pleasant sight to see people all dressed up in high spirits and there's merriment all around. I know people criticise Valentine's Day by saying love is for 365 days and not just a one day show. Yes we do love someone everyday but maybe we don't get the time or opportunity to express that love

everyday."

Shahed (TV actor): Shahed is familiar with Pahela Falgun celebrations since his childhood. "I'm sure the celebrations have been going on for centuries. It's in our roots. But I'm not sure when celebrating Valentine's Day began. I know it's a saint's name, but that's about it. If there has to be a day to celebrate one's love, for me it would be the first time I proposed to my wife," he says. Yesterday, he adds, he saw his yellow *saree* clad wife off to office. "She gave me a hug and went off. These are the small things that matter and that's how we end up celebrating, nothing flashy," he asserts. Shahed emphasises that we take ideas from the western world but it is hardly ever reciprocated.

Apurbo (TV actor, model): "For me Pahela Falgun is more important. It's something engrained in me and I absolutely love the occasion. Early morning I went for a spin just to see girls dressed in yellow *sarees*. They all looked so beautiful," points out Apurbo. This day comes just once a year and is

celebrated in every corner of the country, he adds. On the other hand Valentine's Day is limited to a small number of people. "I also believe love is not just for a single day but you show it in different ways everyday."

Shanta Islam (Actress, director, writer, talk show host): "Why not celebrate every day like Bashonto Utshab and Valentine's Day instead of just once a year?" "questions Shanta Islam. Asked to choose between the two occasions, she says, "As a Bengali I would opt for Bashonto Utshab which is closer to our culture." Nevertheless, she will celebrate both days with enthusiasm -- on Bashonto, she donned a red or yellow *saree*, flowers in her hair and to complete the picture, a red *teep* and glass bangles. Also she wore silver jewellery and *alta* on her feet. The season is also busy professionally for Shanta. For instance, *Jugalbandi* -- a talk show hosted by her -- will be aired today on Rtv. The show will feature newly married couple Tinni and Hillon, both popular actors.

Shampa Reza (Singer,

actress): "For me Bashonto Utshab is more relevant than Valentine's Day. I celebrate the colour, flowers, sky of the spring with the practice of *Basanta Mukhari* (a raga)," says Shampa. She finds her spirit lift at the sight of flowers such as marigolds, bougainvillea and dahlias, among others. However, she regrets the destruction of greenery in and around the city. As for Valentine's Day, Shampa believes that too much hype surrounds the occasion. She regards it as a western import, which rides on the "commercial viability" of the South Asian market. But for those diehards of Valentine's Day, Shampa has a message: "I would like the younger generation to respect love in every sense. Both in our country and abroad people have lost the essence of true love."

Tamanna Rahman (Manipuri dancer): At the outset Tamanna points out that Bashonto Utshab is one of the most widely celebrated festivals in Bengal. To mark this day, Nrityam, a dance school founded by her, participated in the daylong programme organised at Charukala Institute, Dhaka University. Tamanna is unequivocal about the irrelevance of Valentine's Day for her. As she asserts, "Like many others of my generation, I had no exposure to this day in my childhood and teens. Though today's generation celebrates the day in a big way, I somehow cannot relate it to our culture." So what did she do on Bashonto Utshab? Tamanna spent time with her Nrityam students and watched other dancers go through their paces.

Anti-Valentine: Hating love and all that jazz



KARIM WAHEED

It's that dreadful time of the year: the Hallmark-pushed occasion when lovers around the world douse (or at the very least are expected to) the objects of their affection with TLC. Flowers, candies, candlelight dinners, cards scribed with mushy messages, phone calls, whispering sweet nothings into each other's ears... But how does that make you feel, lone individual? Does PDA make your cornea burn? Do you get nauseated by the barrage of Valentine's Day specials on TV?

And for those recovering loveaholics, maybe you don't want to think about how happy you once were, or how happy you could be again if only, or how

This year, revolt; show your discomfort and disgust. Celebrate bitterness. Sneer at cooing lovebirds. Make it obvious you hate love. And to celebrate that odium, listen to songs (more like wails and cries) that highlight love's perilous ways. Here's a list of anti-Valentine songs (not in any particular order):

I'm Not in Love (10cc)

The mother of all anti-Valentine songs. This 10cc song presents the listener with a paradox -- blissfully in love or not quite? Consider this -- *I keep your picture upon the wall, it hides a nasty stain that's lying there, So don't you ask me to give it back, I know you know it doesn't mean that much to me...I'm not in love, no no...*

Don't Speak (No Doubt)

The words are pretty simple and at times clichéd -- *I really feel that I'm losing my best friend, I can't believe this could be the end...* often that's exactly what is going on. Heartbreak isn't always deep and poetic.

Without You (Dixie Chicks)

Choosing one song from the Dixie Chicks' endless list of melancholy country tunes is a dilemma indeed. However, this song articulates the pain of breaking up in the best possible way. *Somebody tell my head to try to tell my heart that I'm better off without you* -- Breaking up is never easy, even when you know it's probably best for you.

Love Bites (Def Leppard)

You must be patient with this song's list of asinine questions -- *Do you tell lies and say that it's forever? Are you wild 'n' willin' or is it just for show and so on. Add the occasional "ooh babe" and it really scores on*

the cheese-factor. But against all odds, the song saves itself: *If you've got love in your sights, watch out, love bites*.

Ex-Factor (Lauren Hill)

This song is little known but quite powerful. This is for the relationship that never seems to be working but you can't pull yourself out of. *No matter how I think we grow you always seem to let me know, it ain't workin', and when I try to walk away you'd hurt yourself to make me stay, this is crazy...*...these words sum up the insanity of loving and hating someone passionately at the same time.

With or Without You (U2)

This U2 song treads the same track as the previously mentioned number but enjoys wider popularity (thanks to the hit sitcom *Friends* featuring it twice). *Sleight of hand and twist of fate, on a bed of nails she makes me wait...I can't live with or without you...* -- poignant indeed.

You Oughta Know (Alanis Morissette)

This enraged ditty introduced the Canadian artist to global fans and made her alternative-rock's angriest girl. *Every time I scratch my nails down someone else's back, I hope you feel it and I'm here to remind you of the mess you left when you went away...* are enough to sober up even the most lovesick of all.

Don't Bother (Shakira)

The Columbian siren moves away from her hip-shaking Latin roots to belt out this grungy, bitter ode to scorned lovers. The result -- brilliant: *And don't bother, I'll be fine, but she's waiting, the ring you gave to her will lose its shine, don't bother be unkind...*

Moushumi 2 (Feedback)

Bangla songs, for centuries, have been eulogising the glories of love. Well, either that or Devdas-esque songs that glorify unrequited love (in certain cases, read "being dumped"). Once in a blue moon, however, you get to hear a Bangla song featuring an enraged lover. And Feedback's *Moushumi 2* is just that: *Tar buk-er alingoney lukiye tumi bhabchho ki amar kotha?...Na kono biroher gaan geye tumi dichho shantonon mon-e, noyon-er jol muchhey tumi korchho upohash...* -- hits the spot, doesn't it?



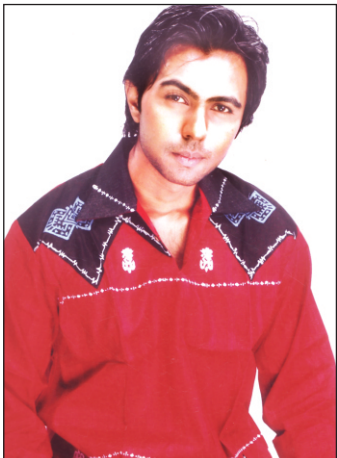
Jaya Ahsan



Shahed



Aupee Karim



Apurbo



Shampa Reza



Tamanna Rahman



Purnima



Richi Solaiman