

Ilias Kanchan: An actor fighting for safe roads

MAHMUDA AFROZ

IT has become a status symbol for artistes all around the world to give charity and participate in awareness building programmes. However, the level of dedication is different when one encounters near fatal death and loses a dear one. Ilias Kanchan, one of the leading actors of the '80s and '90s, has dedicated his life to spreading awareness regarding traffic and safety rules.

Back in 1989 on a dark misty night Ilias was returning from a film shoot and the road ahead was unclear. His car was about to collide with a van. At the last possible moment he swerved his car to save the van and skidded to the other part of the road, only to be crashed by a car coming from the opposite direction. The accident was serious and the doctors in Bangladesh decided to amputate his left leg and arm. His wife objected saying that for an artist to lose an arm and a leg was worse than dying. His life would become meaningless.

He was taken to Singapore for treatment and returned with all his limbs intact. Once back in the country he noticed incidents which he had taken for granted earlier. Like lack of experience among drivers, fitness problem of the vehicles, careless driving, violation of traffic rules and lack of enforcement of traffic rules by the law enforcers.

"I started thinking about the broader picture as to why things were like this and how it could be improved. A few ideas appealed to me amongst which decentralisation and urban planning stuck on. I figured out that all the rush in Dhaka city was due to centralisation. If the industries and garments were placed out of Dhaka then the mad rush could be reduced."



"A few minutes of patience on your side can save a life. I have lost dearly and realise the pain; I don't want others to suffer the same."

"Urban planning is another problem" continues Ilias. "Hawkers, vendors and slum dwellers on the streets often distract drivers and pedestrians have no place to walk but on the roads." In Ilias' opinion "Slums should not have been allowed to mushroom in the first

place. Eviction now is proving to be highly costly in monetary and humanistic terms."

While Ilias was pondering about such issues, as fate would have it, he lost his wife to a car accident in 1993. She was on her way to Bandarban to meet him. Ilias was

engulfed in grief and pain. That's when a journalist friend pointed out that being a public figure he could reach out to millions and spread the message of awareness. "My advisers told me not to as I would become accessible to the public which would ruin my image as an actor. However, I made up my mind and went ahead." On December 1, 1993, Ilias along with his friends and well wishers took out a procession to the Press Club. "My complaint was not against anyone in particular, but in general for traffic rules to be implemented more stringently."

Soon Ilias was traveling to all the districts with his organisation Nirapod Sarak Chai. The organisation now has 65 branches all over the country and they have a 22 point demand list. Some of the demands which have been implemented over the last 13 years are: declaring October 22 as the International Safe Highway Day, removing shops and vendors from the footpaths (gradually being implemented), highway police, research institutes and a traffic council. Some of the demands which are still in the pipeline are: dividers throughout the full length of highways, trauma centers every few miles and traffic training schools for every district.

After 13 years on the roads, Ilias has realised the process is painstakingly slow. He needs support from his fellow country men and requests them to do their bit i.e. to keep driving safe. In his own words, "A few minutes of patience on your side can save a life. I have lost dearly and realise the pain; I don't want others to suffer the same."

Indigenous Performing Art Festival ends 'Ramayana' presented through 'Kushan Gaan'

ERSHAD KAMOL

How aesthetically rich an indigenous performing art can be, was evident in the performance by Kripashindhu Roy and his troupe from Kurigram. Like the master director's best show, the troupe's presentation immensely moved the packed audience at the Experimental Theatre Stage at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. Roy's unique sense of proportion in art in the presentation amazed theatre activists and experts of Dhaka, who were present at the show on February 28.

The troupe staged *Ashameth Jagya* section of the *Ramayana* through *Kushan Gaan*, an indigenous performing art form which is a balanced juxtaposition of dance, drama and music. It was the last show of the weeklong indigenous performing art festival arranged by the Department of Theatre and Film of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

The show began through the acoustics of *dhol*, *bansi* and harmonium, which was followed by the *guru bandana* by the choir. Later the *gayen* (lead singer) accompanied by a *dohar* and *chhokras* (boys dressed like girls) presented *Ashameth Jagya* part of the *Ramayana*, which features the final victory of Ramchandra over Ravan. The story ended with Ram's death in a combat against his two offspring Lab and Kush. Using the mythological story, artistes in *Kushan Gaan* advocate the welfare of human beings. So, improvisation featuring the contemporary time is another important aspect of the art form. And logically the use of *chhokras* in *Kushan Gaan* is not vulgar like the other shows in the festival.



PHOTO: STAR

A colourful presentation by Kripashindhu Roy and his troupe

Rather, three *chhokras* artistically supported the *gayen* and singer during the narration. The speciality of the narration in *Kushan Gaan* is that the lead singer with the choir centering the instrumentalists at the middle of the stage makes circular movements from right to left.

The smooth transition of the artistes from narration to music and acting and vice versa will remain firmly etched in the heart

of the viewers. The use of effective contemporary comic relief and aphorisms during narration of a mythological story is mentionable.

Another important aspect of the show was the use of popular folk music genre *Bhawaiya* in the performing art form. During the scene of Sita's search for her two sons Lab and Kush an actress presented a *Bhawaiya* not in *baithaki* but in a circular move-

ment incorporating the aesthetic sentiment of pathos.

The bold performance of Roy, especially his wonderful narration which had the power to create the sequences in mind of the audience as well as the power to transform from one character to another was moving. And Aynal's performance as Dohar, in diversified characters, was unique.

Film festival on Liberation War, humanism and harmony begins tomorrow



Still from the films *Stop Genocide* (L) and *Sharat* 71

Cultural Correspondent

As part of the silver jubilee celebration of Chalachchitram Film Society, a weeklong film festival on Liberation War, humanism and harmony will be held from March 3 to 9 at Shawkat Osman Memorial Auditorium of Central Public Library, said

Munira Morshed Munni, general secretary of Chalachchitram Film Society at a press conference yesterday.

Veteran filmmaker Subhash Dutt will inaugurate the festival tomorrow at 5:30pm at the same venue. This will be followed by the screening of Russian filmmaker Grigori



Chukhrai's classic film *Ballad of a Soldier*.

A total of 21 films from different countries including Bangladesh will be screened in the festival. Among the films, 17 are full-length features, while two are short and the other two are documentaries.

From March 4 to the end of the

festival, three films will be screened daily at 3:00 pm, 5:00 pm and 7:00 pm.

Eminent filmmaker Morshedul Islam, also the executive president of the Society and Dr Ashkur Rahman, the president of the Society also spoke on the occasion.

Amar Ekushey Granthamela: A successful conclusion

AHSAN HABIB

The month long Amar Ekushey Granthamela, the greatest assemblage of book lovers in the country, ended on the last day of February. Readers, writers and publishers alike hope that the enthusiasm created by the *mela* will help build a solid intellectual foundation for the country.

From the very first day, the Bangla Academy premises were crowded with book lovers. On some days, especially on holidays, people were seen waiting in long queues to get inside the *mela* premises. Because of the relative political stability, a festive mood prevailed through the month. Everyday several new books were launched at Nazrul Manch. Young, passionate literary activists as usual kept the Little Magazine corner animated. Publishing

houses had to work hard to meet the demands of the readers.

Though the number of publications this year is less than last year, the total amount of sales exceeded all time records by quite a large margin. According to a survey conducted by Bangla Academy, the total number of publications is 1929, which is 491 books less than the previous year. This year the total sale is approximately Taka 10 crore whereas last year the amount was nearly Taka 6.5 crore.

On the last day, Bangla Academy gave awards for quality publications. The award winners are Mawla Brothers for Abdus Sakur's *Banglir Muktir Gaan*, Kakoli Prokashoni for Muhammad Zafar Iqbal's *Ektukhani Bigghan*, Anupom Prokashoni for Morshed Shafiu Hassan's *Purbo Banglar Chintachorcha 1947-1970 Dhondo o Protikria*.



PHOTO: STAR

Enthusiastic visitors at the book fair

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Drama serial *Ankush*, written and directed by Abu Sufian, is to be aired on Channel i, every Friday at 9.35pm, beginning tonight.

The serial is based on common characters and events. The central character, Kanran returns home after a stint abroad. From his point of view if anybody has seven necessities he/she can make heaven on earth. Popular names on the small screen such as Enamul Haque, Salahuddin Lavlu, Touquir Ahmed, Deepa Khondokar and

Chanchal Chowdhury are protagonists in the serial.

New cookery show

Viewers of cookery shows get yet another treat. Beginning today on Channel i, a show titled *Desh Bidesher Ranna* will be aired every first and third Friday at 6:20 pm. Directed and hosted by Keka Ferdousi, the show features recipes of a host of culinary delights from both Bangladesh and overseas. The show also incorporates an interactive session with Bangladeshi expatriates.

Must have 'Path-er Sheshey': Down memory lane with Nilufar Yasmin

KARIM WAHEED

Her breathy voice, finesse and absolute command over every tune she rendered made her inimitable. Impeccable vocals were accompanied by refreshing subtlety and modesty – like the melody of a *banshi*. Peers admired her, aspiring artistes looked up to her, music enthusiasts thoroughly enjoyed her songs.

Nilufar Yasmin is a proverbial name in our music arena. Though better known as a Nazrul singer, she rendered songs of Rajnikant, DL Roy and Atulprasad with equal ease.

What many are not aware of is that the gifted artiste began her career with *adhunik* songs and playbacks for films. During the '70s Nilufar Yasmeen recorded several memorable songs written and composed by her husband and mentor, the multifaceted talent, Khan Ataur Rahman. Gradually she became engrossed with the most traditional aspect of Bangla songs, with encouragement from Rahman, who suggested that was her true calling.

The album *Path-er Sheshey*, recently released by Impress Audio Vision Ltd, is a collection of *adhunik* and movie tunes from '70s and '80s. In between 13 songs, narrations by singer Agun (son of Yasmin and Rahman) provide a close look at Yasmin's background, her introduction to the music scene, her insatiable quest to learn every detail of the art and her contribution to it.

The songs highlight a period that is considered the golden era of Bangla songs by many. An era that was defined by uncomplicated and unpretentious compositions. When much emphasis was put on the



Cover jacket of the album *Path-er Sheshey*

libretto.

The opening song *Protidin shondhaye* (written and composed by Khan Ataur Rahman) demonstrates that character. Consider these lines: *Protidin shondhaye harabey je alo, bhor belaye tarey loye keno e aradhona...*

Mago amar jey bhai, another Rahman creation, highlights a nation's ongoing struggles towards liberation. Listening to this underrated and rather unfamiliar song, one wonders why it had not received

the exposure it deserved all these years?

Tomakey pabar agey has that familiar '80s *adhunik* sound. The lyrics however, are intriguing. Sky-high expectations from the object of one's affection and the heartbreak when reality clashes with fantasy are eloquently articulated: *Duur thekey dekhtam shundor bhabtam shai onek bhalo chhilo, jibon-er trishnaye duti haath baratei jibonta hoye gela rikto...*

One of the high points of the album

is Yasmin's National Award winning ditty *Eto shukh shoibo kemon korey*. Written by Md Rafiquzzaman and composed by Khandokar Nurul Alam, the song from the movie *Shubhoda* was highly appreciated for its rather unconventional sound. Audiences familiar with this number would agree that any other artiste rendering this song would be sacrilege. Yasmin's rendition embodies Saratchandra's ever-victimised, repressed heroine through lines – *Bujhi kanna-i lekha chhilo bhagye amar, shukheo kanna taidu chokh bhorey...*

The next song *Diyo na diyo na*, delineates the once popular (now considered politically incorrect) sexist way of portraying women in the light of the ultimate male fantasy – a subservient lover. The artiste sings lines like *Paye dhori priyo paye thelo na* and *Ki achhey tomar kachhey ami nogonyo* with utmost conviction, the way only she could.

One glitch in the album is that the last song, *Je ma-erey ma boley keu dakey na*, has been included twice in the album (the sixth song, which was supposed to be *Agun jwalerrey*, is missing). Apart from that Impress Audio Vision Ltd has done a commendable job of making these songs available which are sure to enrich the collection of a music connoisseur. Digital sound alteration has been done in some cases to ensure better quality.

Nilufar Yasmin had that certain X factor that made mediocre songs remarkable and remarkable songs, classics. Listening to the songs in *Path-er Sheshey* that feat becomes apparent.

Guillermo Del Toro talks 'Tarzan'

Awards glory hasn't gone to Guillermo Del Toro's head. Despite critical adulation for *Pan's Labyrinth*, which has incidentally won three Oscars, the Mexican director has steadfastly refused to get serious, and is happily beaver away with a bunch of genre projects.

Chief among these is a new version of *Tarzan*, which Del Toro says will be "incredibly tough and brutal". According to *Variety*, he is also working on a version of HP Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* and a sequel to *Hellboy*.

Source: BBC



Guillermo Del Toro

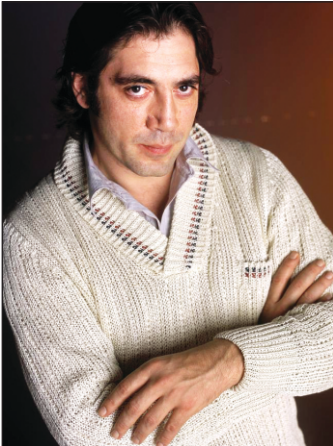
Woody Allen's next project



Penelopé Cruz and Javier Bardem

Spanish actors Javier Bardem and Penelopé Cruz have been pegged for Woody Allen's next film. As usual, the diminutive director is keeping the plot under wraps as well as the title.

The movie involves a group of foreigners on holiday who get caught up in a messy love situation.



Woody Allen making a film about people loafing in the city and obsessing about relationships, who'd have guessed?

Filming is due to begin this summer and there will be some Spanish dialogue.

Source: BBC



Deepa Khondokar in the serial *Ankush*