

Qayyum's cascading colours

The veteran artist turns 75



Artwork by Qayyum Chowdhury

FAYZA HAQ

QAYYUM Chowdhury, whose 75th birthday is being celebrated with an exhibition at the Bengal Gallery today, inhabits a world of his own. It is full of lines, colours, passions, emotions and dreams. He combines years of aesthetics of Indian art with experiences and feelings of his own. His lines appear simple and yet express layers of metaphors and meanings.

After Zainul Abedin and Qamrul Hassan, he is among the best loved artists of Bangladesh. His ideals were always progressive while his vision secular. Fond of music, literature and the cinema, he seeks the best of the variety of life around him. His strokes are swift and sure as he ushers in the beauty and sensitivity of the world around him.

He takes realistic forms and motifs from folk art along with textile designs to form a rhythm of his own. His designs always have a practical formation as his forms are from everyday life. He has also worked on the historical theme of 1971 in his flow of life on his canvas. His lines are delicate and subtle, bringing in the sky, trees, domestic animals, boats and in particular women seen working or resting. The people and places of rural Bangladesh have left a deep mark on his mind and this is what he reflects in his flamboyant greens and blues.

Qayyum Chowdhury says, "The artist who has influenced me most is undoubtedly my teacher, Zainul Abedin. Apart from him, the artists who move me greatly are Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin and Picasso. More recently I met the Australian painter Egon Scholler, who had powerful drawings of human figures and landscapes and he too influenced me. From India I admire Poritor Sen and SH Raja. I don't have formal education overseas but went on study tours to UK, USA, Russia and China. Wherever I went, I visited the art galleries, I tried to learn as much as I could by watching the painting and talking to the artists I came across."



The artist

Before launching on large paintings he makes small sketches and only then progresses to the final canvas or paper. His painting materials are often brought from overseas by friends and patrons. Qayyum says, "I believe that water-colour is most suitable for our weather in Bangladesh." Over the decades, since 1952, when he began as a professional, he has made alternations in his style. An artist's work should always progress, he feels. "While I work I listen to music such as Rabindra Sangeet, Mozart and Beethoven," he says.

Qayyum has won many awards such as the one from Liepzig Book Fair in 1968, the Best Cover design prize from National Book Centre in 1976, Gold Medal from Sultan Foundation in 2001 and Ekushey Padak 1986. He has exhibited in Pakistan, India, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Zimbabwe and Oman.

Lalon's tunes reverberate...

Dol Purnima Festival ends in Kushtia



A Baul performs at the Lalon Akhra

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AMANUR AMAN, Kushtia

The three-day *Dol Purnima* (full moon of Bangla month Phalgun) festival ended recently at Chheuria, popularly known as Lalon Akhra (the den) in Kushtia. The occasion attracted a huge number of Lalon devotees from different parts of the country and abroad. They stayed at the shrine and took part in the festival on all three days.

Khulna Divisional Commissioner Kabir Ashraf inaugurated the three-day programme on Friday last and deputy commissioner of Kushtia Talukdar Shamsur Rahman coordinated the entire programme.

This Dol Purnima Utshab has a tradition of hundreds years. Even the Baul king himself used to organ-

ise it every year at his den. While sponsorship was not forthcoming, this Utshab was organised with donations from well wishers. After Lalon's death, his disciples have been carrying on the Utshab. Subsequently they had formed a committee named Majar Sarif and Seba Sadan Committee (MSSSC).

This year is a watershed since a good number of women and teenage Bauls participated in the festival. Of them some have gained *Khelafat* (the highest state of knowledge and sacredness) and others are in the process of gaining *Khelafat*.

One such Baul woman, Munnujan (40 years old) of Harinakundu in Jhenidah told this correspondent that her father and two brothers are Bauls. Rehana

Khatun, a 28-year-old old teenager of Pakkola village in Daulatpur upazila in Kushtia said she has opted for this way of life for the last couple of years. She has also no intention of returning to the materialistic world.

The folk music genre fuses two streams of spiritual thought—Sufist Islam and Vaisnavism. The branches of religions including Shariat and Shastra strictly resisted this culture. The essence of Baul philosophy is 'self knowledge'.

The Bauls strictly follow their own customs. In their eyes every religion is on par. But division of mankind in the name of religion is not acceptable to them. The festival was an important milestone in the lives of the mystic Bauls.

An evening of mystic music at JU

EMRAN HOSSAIN, JU

Humanist Lalon Shain's outlook to life has been the source of spiritual regeneration or inspiration for the human race against Epicureanism. The messages, which convey love through mystic songs, have made Lalon a universal figure.

With the slogan titled *Korie pagol para tarai nilo shob lutey, shohorer shulajona bombete*, Jusutra, a cultural organisation at Jahangirnagar University (JU), held a cultural evening titled *Lalon Shair Bhab* recently.

Crowds of students, employees and people from villages near the JU campus thronged the venue where Bauls filled the air with mystic songs. Kangalini Sufia, Tuntun Baul, Jahangir Baul and Mandar Fakir rendered a number of songs during the programme following presentation of an instrumental session by the organisers.

Based on a folk classical tune, the seven-minute-long instrumental session was improvised by the organiser involving different instruments. The session received huge

response from the audience while the moonlit evening added to the ambience of mysticism. The instrumental session included flute, *dotara*, guitar (acoustic), guitar (Lead), *Dhol* (a barrel shaped double ended drum), *Khol* (a two-sided drum used for accompaniment with devotional music), *Mandira*, *Moakkas*, *Premjuri* and *Gypsy*. Shaikat, Rahat, Arko, Jami and Ripon alongside others played on their instruments and fascinated the audience.

Tuntun Baul sang *E bhobo tarongo dekhe, Ami opar hoye bose achhi, Milon hobe kotodiney, Ami oi chorone daser jogya noi, Dhonya dhonya boli tare and Ami tomar kangal bandhu* while Kangalini Sufia mesmerised the crowd singing *Satya bolo supothe cholo, Apon ghorer khobor nena and Poraner bandhob re*.

Jahangir Baul sang *Jat gelo bole, Emon manob jonom ki ar hobe and Jiber ki shadhyo bolo* while Mandar Fakir joined the singers with *Badshah Alam panah tumi and Rasul name Modinate ke elore bhai*.



PHOTO: STAR

Musical programme at JU

Udichi's cultural evening and discussion

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

On March 6 cultural organisation, Udichi staged a discussion session and cultural evening at Shoparjito Swadhinota premises in front of TSC, Dhaka University. Titled *Roktosnato Ek Raatey Bojrobina Beje Uthuk*, the programme was held to observe the eighth anniversary of the Udichi bombing at Jessore. To go back in time: On March 6, 1999, during the cultural programme of Udichi's 12th annual national conference, two bombs exploded at Munshi Meherullah Maidan. The grisly act left 10 dead, injured 200 more and shocked the entire nation.

At the discussion speakers called upon the patriotic forces to unite against those who committed crimes against humanity. The speakers were Golam Kuddus, general secretary, Sammilito Sangskritik Jote; Dr Lenin Chowdhury, general secretary, Kendriyo Khelaghor; Mofidul Haque, organiser of Chhayanat; Mizanur Rahman, general secretary, Bangladesh Pathanatok Parisad and Mahbubul Haider Mohon, general secretary, Kranti Shilpi



PHOTO: STAR

Artistes of Udichi during a chorus performance

Gosthi. Professor Badiur Rahman, vice president, Udichi Kendriya Sangsad, presided over the session.

After the discussion the speakers along with the members of Udichi lit candles at the premises to pay homage to the victims of the Jessore bombing. Members of Udichi rendered the song *Muktiro mondiro shopanotole* as the event proceeded.

Then followed the main attraction of the evening -- the cultural

programme. The session featured group and solo songs and recitation. Members of Udichi rendered *Gono Sangeet*. Solo songs were presented by Dr Rohana Ahmed, Sheikh Alaul, Arif Rahman, Nobottom Polash and others while Hassan Arif, Ahkam Ullah, Jharna Sarkar, Maidul Islam along with others performed solo recitations.

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

ATN Bangla will air *Nouroton*, a single episode TV play tonight at 8:45pm. The drama focuses on the ups and downs of life and the universal quest for happiness despite ubiquitous unhappiness.

The plot: On the surface affluent couple Samina and Ifty lead a peaceful life--marred only by their childlessness. Another character is the impoverished Nouroton. Once she had a family -- two children and a husband. However, all her dreams came crashing down when her husband abandoned her. Driven by hunger and poverty, she is forced to go to the city, leaving behind her two children in the village. Coincidentally she ends up at Samina's house. It is from this point that the story starts to unfold.

The play is written by Elina Momota and directed by Chayanika Chowdhury. Azizul Hakim, Tarin, Chanda Mahjabeen play the lead roles in *Nouroton*.



Tarin (L) and co-artiste in the play

National Theatre Festival

Gearing up for success

With the slogan *Katbe Andhar Nobin Praner Srijon Tane*, after many years a National Theatre Festival has been arranged by Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation (BGTF) in association with Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA). This is the third such theatre festival at the national level. Earlier BSA and BGTF jointly arranged festivals at the national level in 1992 and in 1998.

Chairman of BGTF, M Hamid says, "This is the third major initiative carried out by BGTF and BSA. If we get support from the government, we hope to organise a SAARC Theatre Festival including leading troupes of the SAARC countries at the end of this year."

Through a selection process, 46 plays have been included in the 23-day festival, which is simultaneously running at two venues of the academy -- National Theatre Stage and Experimental Theatre Stage.

festival for unavoidable reasons, members from the waiting list will be included."

Explaining the rationale behind arranging a national festival after an extended gap, Secretary General of BGTF Jhuna Chowdhury says, "Patronage from the government level or from City Corporation is needed to for a national theatre festival. Unfortunately this culture has not yet permeated Bangladesh. As a result the federation has to raise funds from private sources."

Director General of BSA Quamrul Hassan (ndc) says, "We have provided two venues free of cost. As a result 46 troupes are staging shows in one compound, which was not possible earlier. One troupe representing BSA is participating in the festival."

"After the completion of the second phase, work of the National Theatre Hall, we hope to provide 'Theatre Museum', 'Theatre

National Theatre Hall in Bangladesh is yet to provide facilities on par with the National Theatre Hall overseas. However, he asserts that by the end of the year they will be able to provide rehearsal rooms for the troupes. He further says, "Under the direction of a world renowned director, BSA hopes to produce a theatre performance, in which selected quality actors from different groups will perform."

The organisers believe that the festival will boost theatre in Bangladesh and attract new viewers. Co-convenor of the festival, Aktaruzzaman who is also the assistant general secretary of BGTF says, "We seek to create new viewers through the festival. We have requested theatre activists to watch performances with their friends and families."

Over 80 theatre activists from different troupes are extending volunteer service to make the



M Hamid



Keramat Moula



Jhuna Chowdhury



Quamrul Hassan, ndc



Abul Kamal Shafi Ahmed



Probir Sardar

PHOTO: STAR

Keramat Moula is the convenor, Aktaruzzaman is the co-convenor and Probir Sardar is the member secretary of the festival committee.

On the selection process, Keramat Moula says, "We have included only those plays, which have not been performed in the earlier festivals. That's why the viewers will get chance to watch several new productions as well as production of the troupes from outside Dhaka. If any troupe member is unable to perform at the

Library, 'Studio Theatre', 'Seminar Room', 'Training Room' and other infrastructure facilities for the theatre practitioners", he adds.

Abul Kamal Shafi Ahmed, Director of the Department of Theatre and Film of the academy says, "Because of a shortfall of funds, we can't jointly organise the festival with BGTF. Still we are the associates of the National Theatre Festival with support from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs."

Ahmed is of the opinion that that

'Ekhono Mirzafar': a social drama

Many contemporary playwrights in Bangladesh have lampooned the rehabilitation of the Pakistani collaborators during the Liberation War. Sarwar Chowdhury's play *Ekhono Mirzafar* features the conspiracy of a Pakistani collaborator of 1971, who after many years of Independence comes back to power and is involved with anti-state activities.

Like other such works, Sarwar in his play has featured the corruption that prevails in contemporary society. Analysing the reason behind the social turmoil, the playwright traces its roots to the rehabilitation of the collaborators. As a result, the Liberation War has appeared in the play as a 'flashback'.

Where playwright Sarwar breaks new ground is that he has created a parallel story of the social history of Bangladesh with the social setting of the popular historical play *Siraj-ud-Doulah*. As a result the characters of *Ekhono Mirzafar* have been analysed from the perspective of historical characters such as Siraj-ud-Doulah, Mirzafar, Mohammadi Beg, Aleya and Golam Hossain.

Director Shahadat Hossain Hilu has used the technique of 'alienation', where the audience is alienated by a narrator to remind them that they are watching a play based on real life, but not the reality.

However, there is room for the development of his directorial compositions especially in the sequences when the Liberation War has been shown in flashback. And it takes much time to transform from one sequence to another. As a result



Actors of Bahurupi Natya Shongstha stage Ekhono Mirzafar

PHOTO: STAR

the interest of the audience flags. And the use of a *Boyati* and his troupe in the beginning of the play does not go well with the rest of the directorial compositions. As a result, though Sarwar Jahan as *Boyati* performed well, the opening of the play has appeared as an ornament.

Arun Bhattacharya as corrupt journalist and Arobinda Sarkar Jibon as a pseudo intellectual have performed well.

No set has been used for the play. However, the light design needs to be improved. Light designer Shahadat Hossain Khan has unrec-

essarily used red and green colours as well as a big zone at the center of the stage.

Ekhono Mirzafar was staged by Bahurupi Natya Shongstha, Mymensingh, on March 7 at the Experimental Theatre Stage. The show was staged as part of the National Theatre Festival arranged by Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation in association with Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

'Jolbalika' staged

On the same evening, Padatik Natya Shongstha (Bangladesh) staged *Jolbalika* at the National Theatre Stage as part of the ongoing National Theatre Festival.

Masum Reza's play *Jolbalika* depicts the story of the village dwellers whose lives are interwoven with the river. The playwright also lashes out against the ills of rural society such as gender inequality. The question he raises is: Who is more important for a rural family--a son or a daughter?

Shamsul Alam Bakul is the director of the play.

by Ershad Kamol



A scene from Jolbalika

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