

Documentary

“The Rasheda Trust”: Life and times of a female entrepreneur

KARIM WAHEED

THANKS to the international recognition to Dr Yunus and Grameen Bank, micro-credit has become a global phenomenon. Micro-credit has changed the lives of many, specifically empowering rural women. Rasheda Begum from Modukhali, southwest Bangladesh is one of them.

A documentary by Jürg Neuenschwander, in collaboration with Razia Quadir, follows the ups and downs in Rasheda's life. The film, made with support of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Swiss Federal Office of Culture, SWISSLO and others, traces the changes in Rasheda's family between 1993 and 2005.

The documentary starts off with Rasheda and her family watching video clips of themselves from 1993. Rasheda, a destitute rural housewife was desperate to change her family's fate. The only source of income was Rasheda's husband Ali Akbar, working as a labourer.

When government officials came to the village and offered the first micro-credits, Rasheda saw her chance. With her first loan she bought 20 square meters of land and started a nursery. In the course of a decade, the family went from barely surviving to expanding the nursery and ensuring a better life for Rasheda's offspring — five daughters and two sons.

The passage was not an easy one for the hard working entrepreneur though. Natural calamities like flood would ruin all saplings at Rasheda's nursery and no sapling means no business, no money;



Rasheda Begum in a scene from the documentary

money that's needed to pay off the loan. Constant reminders and at times harsh suggestions like selling off their land, nag Rasheda and Ali. The mother is disappointed by Laili (Rasheda's oldest daughter) and Pyaru (Rasheda's son), who drop out from school. Village leaders who once helped the family are now not too keen on their progress. Obvious, even if subtle, discrimination a female entrepreneur faces in a male-dominated community, surfaces. But the resilient Rasheda does not budge. Because no flood, or drought, or ruthless extortionate rates of interest from moneylenders can break the indomitable spirit of a woman who has tasted success.

Cinematography by Pierre Mennel, Peter Hammann and Oliver Wills is commendable. Ingrid Städeli was in charge of sound engineering; Peter von Siebenthal had done the sound mixing. Editing by Regina Bärtschi and Eliane Schott could have been more precise though.

The 52-minute long documentary also includes an interview with Dr. Yunus.

The film was launched at Drik Gallery in Dhanmondi yesterday. Rokia Afzal Rahman, former adviser to the caretaker government of Bangladesh, was the chief guest at the event. Dr. Dora Rapold, the Swiss Ambassador; Razia Quadir, co-director of the film and Rasheda Begum were present at the programme.

“Chhuti” and “Brishti”: Two TV plays by Morshedul Islam

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Chhuti and *Brishti*, two TV plays both directed by acclaimed filmmaker Morshedul Islam, had their premiere on June 6 at the Goethe Institut, Bangladesh. *Chhuti*, based on Rabindranath Tagore's short story with the same title, illustrates the reckless but tragic story of a boy while *Brishti*, based on a story by Mohammad Zafar Iqbal, features a mother with psychological disorder and her love for her dead child.

In *Chhuti*, the central character Fatik (played by Fahad) is a 13/14-year old boy, content with his life in a village. One day, he has to leave home with his uncle (Abul Hayat), as he is admitted in a school in the city. Though initially he was eager to leave the village home, suffocated atmosphere of the city and rudeness, cruelty of the aunt (Wahida Molik Joli) make his life unbearable.

Fatik desperately wants to return home where he can play all day long. But the most expected *Chhuti* (vacation) seems far as he becomes ill after a failed attempt to escape from the uncle's house. In the last scene, Fatik's mother (Dolly Zahur) rushes to the city to but by then Fatik had already left for his *chhuti* in another world.

The making of the play is quite uncomplicated as the story suggests. Morshedul Islam has used black and white frames to delineate sad moments and colour frames to capture the bliss in the adolescent's life.

Brishti, the other play revolves around two characters, Rukhsana (Aupi Karim) and Iqbal (Asaduzzaman Noor).

Iqbal selects Rukhsana after an interview, from a pool of applicants.

Young actor Fahad as Fatik in *Chhuti*

She turns out to be an efficient employee.

Everyday Rukhsana leaves her 3-year-old daughter Tisha, home. She never misses work. Her employer Iqbal becomes quite dependent on her.

One day Iqbal wants to drop her home but she does not invite him over. The fact that Rukhsana does not leave her phone number at work, strikes Iqbal as odd too.

Iqbal discovers that Rukhsana

misses office on rainy days. After Rukhsana has missed office for three consecutive days, Iqbal goes over to Rukhsana's to find out if she is okay. He takes a box of chocolates for her daughter. At Rukhsana's place, Iqbal discovers the reality — three years ago Rukhsana's daughter died of cancer, it was a rainy day. Rainy days remind Rukhsana of the death and she can never share with anyone that her daughter is

dead.

Credible performances by both Assaduzzaman Noor and Aupi Karim make the play interesting. Emon Shaha's music creates an apt ambience for the film.

Despite certain limitations like small budget and time constraint, Morshedul Islam had done a commendable job with both plays.

The world of Rabindra Sangeet

In conversation with Nayeema Ali



Nayeema Ali

NIVEDITA RAITZ VON FRENTZ

Nayeema Ali is among the founder members of the Rabindra Sangeet Shilpi Shangstha (RSSS), formed back in 1988, and has held the position of vice president since its inception. No wonder, she waxes lyrical about the beauty of Rabindra Sangeet. "Rabindra Sangeet brings people together. Artists are united in their goal of sincerely wishing to spread their harmonious art form."

At present, two main groups promote and practice Rabindra Sangeet, one being RSSS, dedicated to the singers. The other is the umbrella organisation, Rabindra Sangeet Sammilan Parishad,

involved in Bengali cultural traditions like dance, drama, poetry and such like.

According to the artiste, "Life cannot be without music; it runs in my veins." Nayeema has followed her dream and become one of Bangladesh's foremost proponents of the genre. It is not surprising that she chose this path. "The arts were favoured by my mother's side, while education was the backbone of my father's family." Originally from Narsingdi, she has taught sociology at Dhaka University for the last thirty-six years. Despite teaching pressures, she has managed to devote time to her passion for Rabindra Sangeet.

As is often the case with early learners, Nayeema grew up with music, in a confluence of parental influences. "I was brought up in a cultural atmosphere. My maternal grandmother was a good singer and also played the violin and piano," she reveals. Her father's job led to countrywide travel and Nayeema was fortunate to have received training from local teachers and eminent Dhaka singers, notably, Sadi Mohammad for over ten years. Her classical music base was grounded by *ustads*, Qader Zameri, Yusuf Khan Qureshi, Narayan Chandra Basak and Khandakar Nurul Alam.

The first break came in Nayeema's mid-teens when she auditioned for radio, resulting in a regular slot for *adhunik* or modern songs. All the while, her education continued and it was at university that Nayeema met her future husband, Reza. He was instrumental in her meeting noted Rabindra Sangeet maestros, Sanjida Khatun and Waheedul Haque, founders of Chhayanat, in the late 1960s.

Nayeema briefly attended Chhayanaut herself, and following marriage, continued with Rabindra Sangeet and Classical music lessons at home with Ajit Ray and Zahedur Rahim. Successful Rabindra Sangeet auditions for radio and television in 1983 boosted Nayeema's confidence to take it up seriously. In 1989, she recorded her first solo album at home, followed by an Indian recording debut four years later with the album *Dhonnno Hobo Amrito Alok-e*, released in Kolkata.

Nayeema was involved in the formation of Gitanjali, a small group dedicated to Rabindra Sangeet performers, which continues to have shows. Her most memorable concert experience abroad was in Kolkata, at the Indoor Stadium, at an event to mark noted Rabindra Sangeet singer, Chinmoy Chattopadhyay's death anniversary. "It was my first live experience away from home; of course and I

was nervous, but thrilled that the Indian audience was extremely appreciative."

The RSSS holds an annual festival or *utshob* across the country to promote young artistes. This year's five day *utshob* which coincided with Tagore's 146th birth anniversary and RSSS President, Kalim Sharafi's birthday, was held amid much fanfare at the Dhaka Public Library Auditorium during the first week of May. Discussion sessions on Rabi Thakur's philosophy were also conducted at the *utshob*.

"People come from afar to listen to the music; they are the real aficionados. It is wrong to assume that the public is not interested in Rabindra Sangeet. There is also good public participation during the discussions. People are knowledgeable about various issues and we could learn a lot from them."

Nayeema is hopeful about the spread of Rabindra Sangeet in the country. "I am confident about its diffusion, as eminent artistes are guiding and promoting young people," she said.

Rabi Thakur was very modern in his outlook and Rabindra Sangeet was greatly influenced by western classical music. Of course, there have been changes in its development over the years. Nayeema believes there is more orchestration now than ever before, which she considers to be a good thing. According to her, Rabi Thakur was responsible for awakening the "Bangaliana" in people. Evidently, she is a big fan, for she smilingly says, "Rabi Thakur's versatility cannot be found in other artistes. Great people never die; he will continue to remain part of our lives."

The writer is a freelance contributor

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

"*Odissi*, one of the genres of Indian classical dance, developed in the hills of Udaygiri (now

Bhubaneswar), dating back to the second century B.C.E," said Kiran Segal, one of the most innovative and outstanding choreographers of this art form. The dancer was sharing



Kiran Segal and Ajit Gupte (counsellor of press information and culture, Indian High Commission), speak at the press conference

Javed's fantasy world of lines and washes

FAYZA HAQ

Javed Jilil's ongoing exhibition titled "Lines of Madness" at the Goethe Institut, is a collection of intriguing pen and ink work with washes. He got into drawing and painting when he was in USA in 1991. After a traumatic accident Javed found salvation in studying the works of Picasso and Goya, and delving deep into the art world. "I tried to find my own language and felt that painting would be the way to involve myself mentally and spiritually," says Javed. "I try to deal with lines that are spontaneous and fluid. The drawing is like writing of inner thoughts. It takes up the climax of the visual world, which is subjective in its essence and objective in its execution. My thoughts reach out from a sensual journey not only into the world of exotic but one of fear and destruction. Sensation has its stimulation."



The artists who inspire him include Francisco Goya and Gustaf Klimt. He also greatly admires the works of Michael Angelo.

Javed's works recall the anger and destruction in Picasso's "Guernica" and Dante's "Inferno", dealing with the sins of the soul and the suffering in hell, says Shaheen Rashid of the Goethe Institut. He creates a pattern of twisting and twirling figures of men, women, animals and a fantasy world of joys and sufferings. This he does with quick pen and brush strokes, using a lot of black on white, with occasional touches of pale washes. In the works on display at the exhibition, lines are merging and melting together, slowly building up fascinating images in the visual world.

The titles help the viewers perceive the drawings such as "Octopus women" "Dancing with the wind," and "Thoughts in the balance". Sometimes the artist thinks first of the title and then the drawing. At times it is vice versa. In this exhibition he has dealt with uncertainties, fears and the destruction of the environment. Some of the works are like "Infinite movement" where there are a lot of figures struggling for an ultimate goal. The black lines are used for concrete feelings rather than ornate beautification.

One of the drawings deals with two angels playing with each other. "In this world all the pain has been transformed into tranquility," says Javed. "It also has a sensual and erotic feeling



Artworks by Javed Jilil

about it going by the gestures of the figures." There is a water-colour wash on top and one in oil at the forefront.

"Thought in the balance" brings in a woman trying to find thoughts of right and wrong within herself. "Rare view with locked dreams" is an intricate, sensual work, which features a woman reaching out for freedom, guarding her dreams.

"Soft clouds" stands for power and it brings in two figures contained in the stomach of an imaginary animal."

Javed's fantasy forms are well worth seeing. The exhibition ends on June 14.

Bangladesh in a positive light

Series of documentaries to promote national achievements

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Japan Bangladesh Cultural Forum (JBCF), an organisation working to ensure cultural interaction between Japan and Bangladesh, will be making a documentary series titled *Potential Bangladesh* to highlight the positive aspects of the country. Members of JBCF discussed their plans about the upcoming project at a press conference held at a restaurant in Dhaka on June 6.

JBCF was formed in July 12, 2006, since then it has been working with the Japanese Embassy in Bangladesh.

Takashi Asai, first secretary at the Japanese Embassy, was the chief guest. Mostafa AH Talukder and Momtazuddin Bhuiyan, advisers of JBCF and Mohammed Moshior Rahman Akbar, a patron



PHOTO: STAR

Takashi Asai speaks at the conference

of the organisation, attended the programme as special guests. Harun-ur-Rashid, chairman of JBCF presided over the occasion.

"The aim of the series is to present Bangladesh in a positive light to the world. Each episode will zoom in on a particular sector like energy, engineering, tourism, agriculture, education and so on, highlighting the achievements," said Rashid.

"We want to show the world that Bangladesh, like many other countries, offers opportunities to investors, tourists, namely anyone interested," he added.

The series will have its premier in Japan. Shooting for the documentaries is scheduled to start from June 11 this year.