

# The illustrious career of a playwright

In conversation with Syed Shamsul Haq

ERSHAD KAMOL

POET, dramatist and novelist Syed Shamul Haq is also one of the major playwrights of Bangla literature. Since his first play, *Payer Awaaj Paowa Jaye* he has blazed a distinctive trail. Plays by him including *Nurul Diner Shara Jibon*, *Irsha*, *Khatta Tamasha*, *Juddho Ebong Juddho* and others are considered as some of the most prolific plays in our neo-theatre movement. So far he has written 15 original plays, three translations of Shakespeare plays and two adaptations.

In Haq's own words, "My translation of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* will be directed by Ataur Rahman for Nagorik Natyasampradaya. Ramendu Majumdar will direct my play *Krishnapakkho* for his troupe, Theatre. Aly Zaker and Sara Zaker will direct two plays, *Shesh Joddha* and *Naarigon*, respectively for Nagorik. I'm currently working on another script, which I will give to Nasiruddin Yousuff."

Syed Shamsul Haq's plays deal with the universal human aspiration to be liberated. "Through the ages human beings have suffered captivity, created by the faulty structuralism of society," to quote Haq. "I don't like my scripts to be labelled. A play may have different messages. All major playwrights in the world who have written plays that contain universal relevance, have dealt with the issue of freedom. My intention is also to write universal plays."

What is the secret of his success as a playwright? "It is impossible for a creative person to pinpoint any particular secret. In most of the

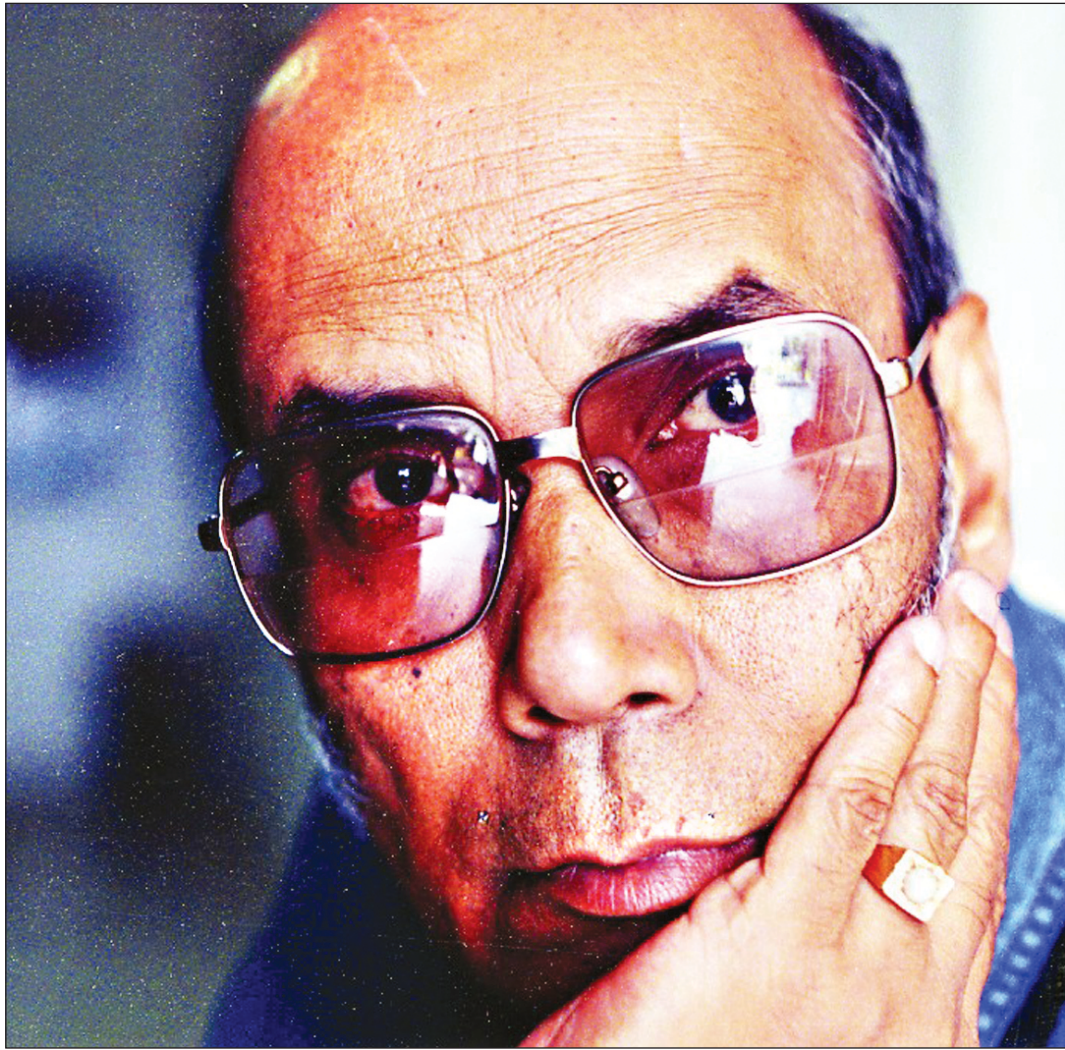


PHOTO: MASRAJI MIHMAN

cases it's the urge within that compels one to do something creative. I have written plays -- both in lyrical and prose forms, as well as combining the two. As the 'verse' form is a part of our tradition, I prefer to employ it and I've also written prose-drama. It is the theme and

message of the play that guide my choice of form. I can safely say that when I wish to stir the sentiments of the audience, I prefer the verse form and when I want to raise questions I prefer the prose form," continues Haq, "And craftsmanship is very important for a play. The

contemporary 'rhythm' of the speech' should be reflected in the dialogue diction."

Haq does not want to restrict his creativity to a particular tradition of a region; rather he prefers traditions of the world. He says, "Blending of cultures is a continuous process. I

like to take elements from all over the world. I firmly believe that sticking to a particular tradition makes a style stagnant. And I consider those 'cultural fundamentalists', who cannot produce quality works due to ethnocentrism. For example, 'narrative' is one of our traditional styles, but I believe it should not be the only form. Those who believe that it should be the only style of 'Bangla theatre' are making our culture stagnant."

Over the years several playwrights have translated and adapted foreign plays. At the forefront is Haq. His translation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Tempest* and the adaptation of Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*, titled *Mukhosh* are among the most successful theatre productions.

Which aspects should a translator or adaptor concentrate on? Haq responds, "First of all it should be easily communicative. Moreover, the translator or adaptor must have the 'space sense' of theatre. Otherwise, it can be a quality translation but won't necessarily be quality theatre. Whatever I write -- original play or translation -- I visualise the whole play first. I believe in strong texts. I don't allow anyone to adulterate my text."

What does he like to be called -- poet, playwright or novelist? Haq's preference: "Poet." "A poet is a master of all creative writing."

So far, Syed Shamsul Haq has won all the major awards of the country including Ekushey Padak, Swadhinata Padak, Bangla Academy Padak and others. Moreover, a scholar of Department of Bangla, Rajshahi University has done a PhD on Haque's works.

# "Aha" goes to Munich Film Festival



Humayun Faridee (L) and co-artist in *Aha*

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Architect turned filmmaker Enamul Karim Nirjhar's film *Aha* has been selected to participate at this year's Munich Film Festival, which starts today and will continue till June 30. *Aha* is the only Bangla feature film participating in the 'New Asian Cinema' category at the festival. The filmmaker, Nirjhar, goes to Munich on June 24. Three shows of *Aha* will be held at the festival.

Expressing his reaction, Nirjhar says, "I'm elated that my first feature film is participating at an international event of this stature. However, it would've been better if I could release the film in Bangladesh before screening it abroad. In fact, my target audience are the masses

of the country; recognition at international film festivals is not my priority. Due to some bureaucratic tangles related to censorship, I could not release *Aha* in Dhaka before going to Munich."

Featuring the story of a family living in old Dhaka, *Aha* zooms in on the different issues city-dwellers face everyday, like unplanned urbanisation, generation gap and more. Apart from direction, Nirjhar has written the story and developed the screenplay. The filmmaker says, "The artists and crew members found the story catchy and I've received their support all through the filmmaking process."

Humayun Faridee, Tariq Anam Khan, Fazlur Rahman Babu, Shathi Yasmin, Ferdaus, Khaled Khan and

others have performed in the central roles. Songs used in the film have been written by Nirjhar and set to tune by Indian music director Devijoti Misra.

After the Munich festival, Nirjhar plans to release the film at different theatres in Bangladesh. He says, "Movies should be made for the mass. As a filmmaker, I prefer film releases at theatres and not on TV channels. I believe we can resurrect the golden era of Bangla films, if talented independent filmmakers of the country get proper patronage and the masses go back to the theatres."

*Aha* is an Impress Tele-film production.

# Sufia Kamal's 96th birth anniversary observed

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Chhayanat

Chhayanat arranged a musical soiree at its Sangskriti Bhaban on June 20 to commemorate poet Begum Sufia Kamal's 96th birth anniversary. The programme titled "Srotar Ashar" featured performances by Dr. Sanjida Khatun, Ifrat Ara Dewan, Mahiuzzaman Chowdhury and Anindita

Chowdhury. The artists rendered songs of Rabindranath, Nazrul and Atul Prasad.

Sufia Kamal was the founder president of Chhayanat and held the position till her demise. "Srotar Ashar" was first initiated in 1962 with Sufia Kamal as the president of the organisation. After many years the programme resumed at Chhayanat's own building. From now on the programme will be held on the third

Thursday of every month.

Dr. Sanjida Khatun, president of Chhayanat, started the event with songs Sufia Kamal admired -- *Amar din phuralo*, followed by *Jodi prem dilena praney* and *Amarja achihey*.

Anindita Chowdhury, a student of Chhayanat, rendered popular Nazrul songs *Aai maru parer haowa*, *Bulbul nirob nargis bon-e*, *Pardeshi megh jaore phire* and more.

Mahiuzzaman Chowdhury

rendered popular Tagore songs including *Tomaye gaan shonabo*, *Abar eshechhey ashadh* and *Khelaghar bandhitey eshechhi*.

Artist Ifrat Ara Dewan was the last singer of the evening. She rendered *Ami bandhilam tomar* a song of Atul Prasad and *Aji tomaye abar chai shonabarey*, *Bondhu nid nahi ankhi pat-ey* and more.

**Bangladesh Mahila Parishad**

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad celebrated the 96th birth anniversary of Poet Sufia Kamal with a commemorative speech and a cultural programme on June 20. The programme was held at the BIAM Auditorium. The Parishad also announced the introduction of Sufia Kamal Award to be handed over on Rokeya Dibash on December 9.

At the programme Mita Haque and Ifrat Ara Dewan rendered some of Sufia Kamal's favourite Tagore songs -- *Amar dukhoganina*, *Amarey tumi oshesh korechho daan* and *Aguner poroshmoni chhowao praney*. Pragna Laboni and Bhaswar Bandyopadhyay recited poems.

Ayesha Khatun, general secretary of the organisation announced the introduction of yearly Sufia Kamal Award. This year's recipient is researcher Dr. Golam Murshid, she said.

Litterateur Hassan Azizul Haque delivered the commemorative speech titled "Sufia Kamal O Gonotontre Andolon" (Sufia Kamal and the democratic movement). Activist Hena Das presided over the programme.



Actors of Natyajon in *Aleek Babu*

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Natyajon will stage the 25th show of its production *Aleek Babu* on June 23 at the Indian Cultural Centre in Gulshan.

Jyotirindranath Tagore's comedy *Aleek Babu* centres on Aleek Prokash, who frequently lies to attract the attention of a classy lady Hemangini. Hemangini gets her ideas of romance from novels. Proshanna, a widowed domestic help, plays a go-between for Aleek and Hemangini, so that Hemangini will help her marry Godadhar.

Godadhar also tries his best to help the couple. When Aleek's credentials evoke a doubt in the mind of Hemangini's father Satya Sindhu, a disguised Godadhar bails out Aleek.

Bhaswar Bandyopadhyaya directs the play.

Earlier, after receiving an invitation from the Council for Cultural Relation (ICCR), Natyajon staged *Aleek Babu* in New Delhi, Kolkata and Lukhnow.

# Bankimchandra's "Rajani" on ATN Bangla

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Based on Banikmchandra Chattopadhyay's novel, single episode TV play "Rajani" will be aired on ATN Bangla tonight at 8:45pm.

The story revolves around Rajani, a visually impaired girl adopted by an impoverished flower vendor. One day while taking flowers to Labangalata, a Zamindar's wife, Rajani meets Sachindra, the son of the Zamindar. However, she cannot reveal her feelings to anyone. Labangalata arranges Rajani's marriage to the aging, already

married Gopal. A heartbroken Rajani tries to kill herself, but is saved by Amarnath.

Amarnath develops feelings for Rajani and finds out that Rajani is the real owner of Sachindra's property. Amarnath then takes steps to get the property back to its true owner. Determined to keep the ownership of the property, Labangalata now hatches a plan to get Rajani married to Sachindra.

Badrul Anam Soud has directed the play. Dipa Khandakar, Ahsan Habib Nasim and Fahmida Haque Koli have played the lead roles.



Dipa Khandakar (R) and co-actor in *Rajani*

# "Sisimpur": Reaching out to children all over Bangladesh

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

*Sisimpur*, a popular programme on BTV, is designed specifically for children to provide pre-school lessons in a simple way. *Sisimpur* is a symbolic village in which the moppets, through gaiety and merriment, teach basic lessons.

Grameen Manobik Unnayan Sangstha (GMUS), a rural development organisation held an orientation programme on children's education through *Sisimpur* at the Mymensingh Zila Parishad auditorium recently.

Nayantara Communications, producer of the show, supported the programme.

Md. Abdul Khaleque, executive director of GMUS, chaired the programme while Professor Amir Ahmed Chowdhury Ratan, headmaster of local Mukul Niketan High School was the chief guest. Among others Shahnaz Begum, project manager of Nayantara Communications in Dhaka and Md. Mizanur Rahman, project manager of *Sisimpur*, spoke at the event.

Md. Mizanur Rahman said that *Sisimpur*, based on the hugely popular American children's show

*Sesame Street*, is being aired on BTV since April 1, 2005 on a regular basis and has attained mass attention of Bangladesh children.

"To provide the children pre-school lessons, we are working with researchers of the country," Mizanur Rahman said, adding that through fun and games children can be

taught different things.

Later an open discussion was held on how the show could be made more attractive and productive for rural children.

Over 50 representatives from different NGOs, educationists and journalists attended the programme. *Sisimpur* is funded by USAID.



The moppets of *Sisimpur*

# Nicole Kidman: Fabulous at 40

Turning 40 on June 20, Nicole Kidman maintains her status as one of most sought after and highest paid actors in the world. An insight in the actor's illustrious career and life:

Nicole began her career in showbiz as a dancer, beginning with ballet training at the age of three. By 10, she had become a student of drama at Sydney's Australian Theatre for Young People. Her first onscreen appearance was in a music video for Pat Boone's *Bop girl* (1983).

In the same year, she appeared in the made-for-television movie *Bush Christmas*, and the critically acclaimed *BMX Bandits*. A number of television and movie roles were to follow, including *Vietnam* (1987) and *Bangkok Hilton* (1989).

The 1989 psychological thriller, *Dead Calm*, proved something of a breakthrough for Nicole, establishing her as a rising talent. The following year she starred in her first American feature film, *Days Of Thunder* (1990) opposite Tom Cruise, whom she met for the first time on the sets of the film. The couple married later in the same year.

In the years following her marriage to Cruise, Nicole appeared in a number of movies, notably *Billy Bathgate* (1991) for which she received a Golden Globe nomination, *Far And Away* (1992) which also starred Cruise; and the hugely successful *Batman Forever* (1995).

In the satirical dark comedy *To Die For* (1995) Kidman played the role of Suzanne Stone, an ambitious and manipulative news anchor. *To Die For* earned her a BAFTA award nomination and a Golden Globe.

Her performances in 1996's *Portrait Of A Lady* (based on the novel by Henry James) and the stage production *The Blue Room* also received critical praise. In 1999, Kidman starred opposite her husband in *Eyes Wide Shut*, Stanley Kubrick's controversial last film.

Nicole's marriage to Cruise fell apart in 2000 when the couple separated shortly before their 10th anniversary. The couple was divorced in 2001.

The reasons for the divorce were never made clear and became the subject of media speculation, especially after Kidman's miscarriage during the same period.

The year of her divorce was also the year when Nicole's acting career really took off. The actor who was somewhat overshadowed by her husband's superstardom earlier, now plunged into a series of challenging roles.

The year 2001 saw her in Baz Luhrmann's Academy Award



winning musical *Moulin Rouge*, a psychological suspense thriller called *The Others*, and the offbeat *Birthday Girl*.

*Moulin Rouge* also showcased Nicole's vocal talent as she sang several songs in the film, notably the duet *Come what may* with her co-star Ewan McGregor.

She was nominated for the Best Actress Academy Award and won a Golden Globe for her performance in *Moulin Rouge*. She also bagged the Golden Globe and BAFTA nominations for her role in *The Others*.

The same year, her duet with Robbie Williams, *Somethin' stupid*, was the UK's number one Christmas single.

In 2002, Nicole was made to look almost unrecognisable as writer Virginia Woolf in *The Hours*. The role, for which she was had to wear a prosthetic nose, won her an Academy award, a BAFTA award and a Golden Globe.

Performances in Lars Von Trier's *Dogville* and Anthony Minghella's *Cold Mountain* followed in 2003. The actor received yet another Academy Award nomination for *Cold Mountain*.

The year 2004 saw Nicole in the critically panned *The Stepford Wives* and the controversial film *Birth*. Offscreen, the actress met country singer Keith Urban in 2005, whom she married the next year.

Last year, Nicole's musical skills were once again on display as she lent her voice to the character Norma Jean in the animated film, *Happy Feet*. She also starred opposite Robert Downey Jr in the critically acclaimed *Fur: An Imaginary Portrait Of Diane Arbus*.

This year, Nicole will be seen along with Daniel Craig in *The Invasion*, a science fiction film slated for release in August. Later this year, she returns with Craig in *His Dark Materials: The Golden Compass*, the first movie of a fantasy trilogy.

The 40-year old actor seems to be at the peak of her career.

Source: Internet