

The illustrious career of a playwright

In conversation with Syed Shamsul Haq

ERSHAD KAMOL

POET, dramatist and novelist Syed Shamsul 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 Rahaman for Nagorik Natyasaampradaya. Ramendu Majumdar will direct my play *Krishnapakho* for his troupe, Theatre Aly Zaker and Sara Zaker will direct two plays, *Sresh 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

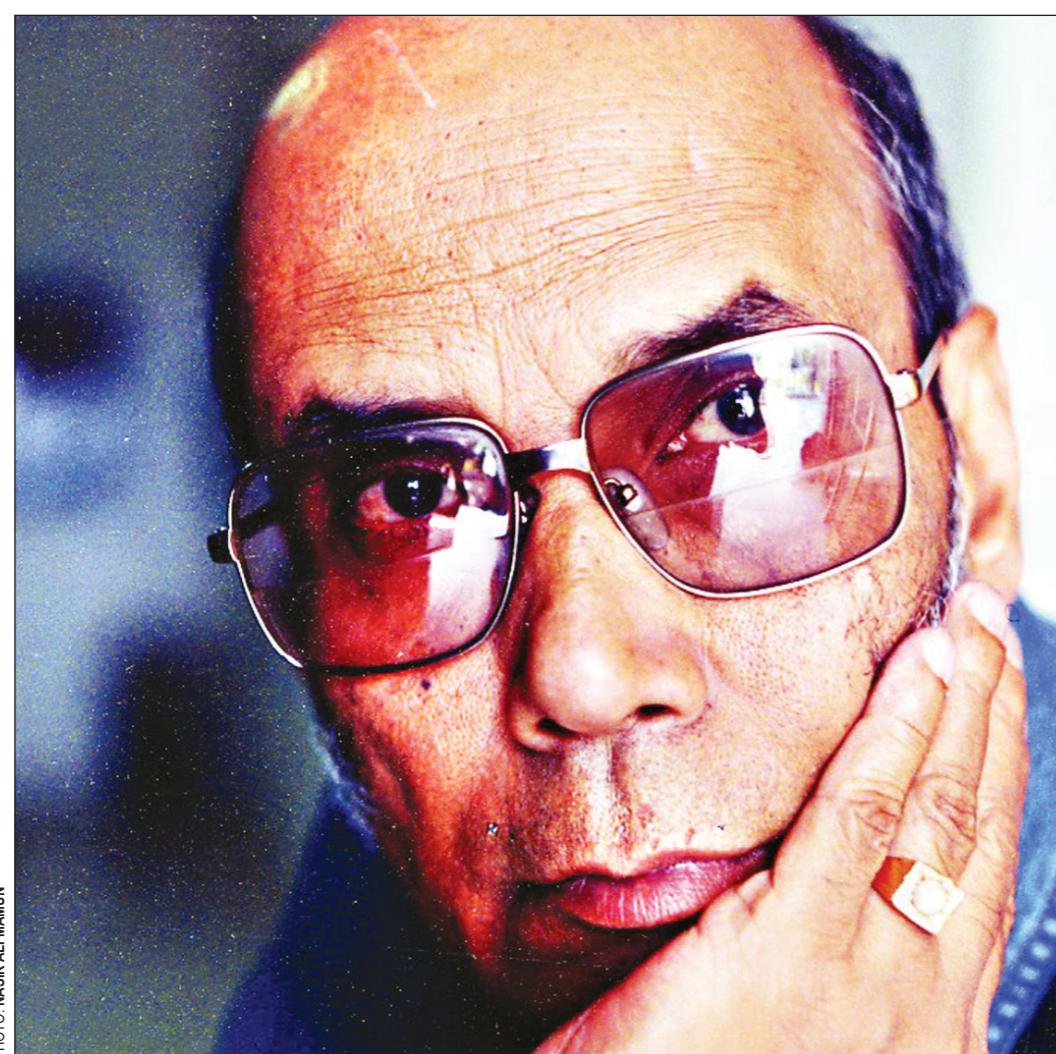


PHOTO: NASIR ALI MAMUN

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 guides 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 artistes 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, Ferdous, 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 Sangsriti Bhavan on June 20 to commemorate poet Begum Sufia Kamal's 96th birth anniversary. The programme titled "Srotor Ashar" featured performances by Dr. Sanjida Khatun, Iffat Ara Dewan, Mahiuzzaman Chowdhury and Anindita

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

Sufia Kamal was the founder president of Chhayanat and held the position till her demise. "Srotor 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 di phuralo*, followed by *Jodi prem dilema pranay* and *Amarja aachhey*.

Anindita Chowdhury, a student of Chhayanat, rendered popular Nazrul songs *Aai maru parer haowa, Bulburi 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 bandhney eshechhi*.

Artist Iffat Ara Dewan was the last singer of the evening. She rendered *Ami bandhilam tomar* a song of Atul Prasad and *Aji tomaye abar chai shonabare, Bondhu nai anki 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 Iffat Ara Dewan rendered some of Sufia Kamal's favourite Tagore songs -- *Amar dukhojanagani, Amarey tumi oshesh korechha daan* and *Aguner poroshmoni chhowao pranay*. 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 Mursid, she said.

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

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