

Growing popularity beyond the border

In conversation with Shibli Mohammed

NADIA SARWAT

BEING our closest neighbour, Indian TV channels are quite popular in our country. Occasional visit of leading Indian celebrities are usually greeted with much fanfare. But when compared, it's not easy for Bangladeshi artists to attain the deserved recognition in India, mainly because our TV channels have no access there. Seasoned Bangladeshi dancer Shibli Mohammed, with his appearance

as a regular judge in a celebrity dance competition on a well-known Indian channel, has managed to go beyond that uneven cultural relationship. After his return from India, the *kathak* exponent shared his experience with *The Daily Star*.

"In the last two years, I participated in the *Rabindra Jayanti* festival in Kolkata. I performed two dance dramas, *Shyama* and *Shap Mochon* with popular film actress and dancer Rituparna Sengupta there. It was much appreciated by

the Kolkata audience and helped me create an impression as a Bangladeshi artist. In October 2007, producers of the celebrity dance competition *Ritur Mela Jhum Ta Ra Ra*, aired on the satellite channel ETV Bangla, contacted me and wanted to know if I was interested to be a judge on the show," said the dancer.

The programme turned out to be a success and the high TRP rate suggested the enormous popularity of the show in Kolkata. Thanks to the show, Shibli has now become

a familiar face to the Kolkata audience. His insightful, authentic observations and unbiased judging have also earned him respect.

"I graciously accept the adoration of the audience. The producers of the show considered me as a judge because I'm a Bangladeshi artist so I shouldn't have any reason to be biased towards any of the Indian competitors," said Shibli.

Speaking on his experience, the artist said, "It was a pleasure to meet some of the leading cultural personalities of India through the programme. Mithun Chakrabarty, Javed Jaffrey, Mahima Chowdhury, Koena Mitra, Tanushree Dutta, Babul Supriyo, Rituparna Sengupta, Bangladeshi actor Ferdous and others have attended the show as guest judges. But meeting the dancing legend Helen, was

truly one of the most mesmerising experiences of my life!"

The show is now aired three times a week at 10 pm (Bangladesh time). The finale of the show will be aired in the last week of this month that will feature Helen as the special guest.

"The competitors were mostly amateur dancers, but their devotion to the performances amazed me. Some of them even cancelled their shooting schedules for it. I don't see that kind of dedication and commitment much in our country," Shibli regretfully said.

The artist appreciated the thematic variation of the episodes in the dance competition. However, he felt that the competitors were over-emphasising on the chart-topping Hindi songs for their performances, whereas responses from both the audience and the judges clearly indicated that Bengali songs were more popular in Kolkata. There was an episode on the theme 'Bangladesh' where the participants chose songs by Runa Laila and James. But Shibli expressed his dissatisfaction at the fact that there were no episode on Rabindra and Nazrul Sangeet, which are integral parts of Bengali music.

Shibli Mohammed is now busy organising the approaching dance festival titled *Nrittanchal Utshab*, which will be held from January 24 to 26. Renowned dance artistes Shamim Ara Nipa, Sukalyan Bhattacharya and his team 'Sukalyan and Entourage' from India and 150 young dancers from Bangladesh will perform at the event.

1st International Children's Film Festival to begin on January 28



(From left) Morshedul Islam, Professor Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, Fuad Chowdhury and Munira Morshed at the press conference

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

The 1st International Children's Film Festival in Dhaka will be held from January 28 to February 3, festival director Morshedul Islam said at a press conference at the Conference Lounge of National Press Club on January 9. With the slogan "Future in Frames" the festival will be organised by Children's Film Society Bangladesh.

An impressive assortment of over 100 films -- feature, short, animation and documentary -- from 25 countries will be screened at the festival. A considerable number of films are participating from Germany, Russia, Iran and India. A selection of children's films produced in Bangladesh so far will also be a part of the festival, Morshedul Islam added.

Chief Adviser to the Caretaker Government, Fakhruddin Ahmed is expected to inaugurate the festival.

According to Morshedul Islam, one of the most significant features of the festival would be the participation of nearly 100 child representatives from across the country. They are selected through an essay writing competition on "My Favourite Movie". The organisers will provide food and transport expenses for each child and one of her/his guardians. Two *adivasi* children from Khagrachhari and 20 children with special needs from Dhaka are also invited to the festival. Apart from the opportunity to watch all the films, they will enjoy time with three eminent personalities and listen to their experiences and make enquiries. A daylong workshop and a seminar on children's movies will be held on February 1 and 2 respectively.

An advisory committee has been formed for the festival with eminent cultural personality Mostafa Monwar as the Chairperson and popular writer of the children's

literature genre, Professor Muhammad Zafar Iqbal as the Vice-chairperson.

"It is heartening to know that a film festival targeted towards the children is going to take place. Though children make up a large portion of our population, we virtually have no entertainment provisions for them. This initiative will surely contribute to make children more curious and interested," said Professor Zafar Iqbal.

The festival will be held in five auditoriums -- Shawkat Osman Auditorium and Seminar Hall at the Central Public Library, Goethe-Institut, Iranian Cultural Centre and Russian Centre for Science and Culture.

Professor Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, Morshedul Islam, Munira Morshed and Fuad Chowdhury among others, attended the press conference.



Shibli with legendary Bollywood dancer Helen

“Meeting the dancing legend Helen, was truly one of the most mesmerising experiences of my life!”

Buzz

“Doriya Parer Doulati”: Abdullah Al Mamun's upcoming feature film

JAMIL MAHMUD

After nearly eight years, veteran actor-director-scriptwriter and filmmaker Abdullah Al Mamun is all set to release his new feature film. The film, *Doriya Parer Doulati*, is likely to be released either on February 21 or March 26 this year. The film features the relentless struggles of the community of labourers living in Hatia, who toil to build a barrage to save the island from tidal waves. Dirt-poor Doulati (Poppy) is beautiful

and charming. She loves Boli (Manna) and wants to be with him. But her dream of a blissful romance is shattered when goons kill Boli. Hell hath no fury like an enraged woman and Doulati takes revenge by killing the murderers of her lover. Abdullah Al Mamun, Ferdousi Majumdar and Shahidul Alam Sachchu play the other central roles in the film.

"Right now, the film is awaiting clearance from the Censor Board," informed Abdullah Al Mamun. The film is an adaptation of a novel by

the late freedom fighter, Kamal Uddin Ahmed, better known as *Bangla Kamal* to the people of Hatia. Abdullah Al Mamun has written the screenplay. Ali Akbar Rupa and Arman Khan are the music directors of the film.

Mamun's last film *Bihanga* was released in 1999.

"The film was mostly shot in the island of Hatia as the story is based on the locale. The rest was done at Dhonbari in Tangail, Hotapara and also at FDC," said Mamun.

The director also shared several interesting incidents that occurred during the making of the film. "Probably, we were the first team to shoot at the spot, which drew a massive crowd of nearly ten to twelve thousand people everyday. Our entire team had to work hard to prevent them from disrupting the shooting. We chalked out a plan that proved to be quite effective and the local people also turned out to be cooperative. Everyday before shooting, we drew a line around the spot and asked them not to cross it -- they agreed to our plan and method of working," said a smiling Mamun.

"Communication is a major hurdle and we had to struggle everyday to go from one spot to another. Sometimes all we had to eat for days was dry fish. Another dreadful incident happened when one of the unit boys was almost stuck in the quick sand.

"The theme of the film is the turbulent lives of the labourers in a coastal area. I am quite optimistic that this film would receive the same kind of response *Shareng Bou* (1978) or Amjad Hossain's *Golapi Ekhon Train-e* (1978) was garnered with," concluded Abdullah Al Mamun.



Abdullah Al Mamun and Poppy in a scene from the film

TV Watch “Negative Positive” on Channel- i

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Channel- i will telecast a single-episode TV play *Negative Positive* today at 2:30 pm.

The play features a tense day in Dhaka. As the situation gets out of control, the authorities impose an immediate curfew with a two-hour notice. As the news of the curfew breaks out, people start to rush towards safety but not everyone makes it. Aurko and Bula both get

caught up in chaos. Taken by complete surprise they become confused. Not sure of what to do the complete strangers team up to overcome the situation. At a point the duo takes shelter at a house in a desperate attempt to evade arrest. From this point the story takes an unusual turn.

The play is written and directed by Rezanoor Rahman. The cast includes Musharaf Karim, Tisha, Shubho, Raida and others.



A scene from the play

Daylong Poush Mela at Ramna Botomul today



PHOTO: STAR

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Poush Mela Udjapon Parishad is organising the Poush Mela (Winter Fair) at Ramna Botomul in Dhaka today. Starting at 7:00am the *mela* will continue till 8pm.

The daylong *mela* will feature plays, poetry recitation, songs,

dance performances and of course the main attraction, traditional *pitha* (rice-cakes), date juice and other delicacies.

Different stalls with their wide varieties of *pitha*, pottery and other handicrafts will contribute to the diversity of the arrangement.

“Pragoitihashik” staged in Kolkata

Nagorik Natyangan plans to reintroduce matinee shows

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Recently, a 35-member Nagorik Natyangan troupe, led by Dr. Enamul Haque, staged two shows of *Pragoitihashik* at the Ganga-Jamuna Theatre Festival in Kolkata. The troupe staged the first show at the Academy of Fine Arts Stage on December 30 and the second show at Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam Stage on December 31, 2007.

Pragoitihashik is an adaptation by Mahmudul Islam Selim of a short story by Manik Bandyopadhyay. The play is directed by Lucky Enam.

Sharing her experiences regarding the shows in Kolkata, Lucky Enam said, "To celebrate the birth centennial of litterateur Manik Bandyopadhyay, the Kolkata-based organisation 'Anik' arranged the 13th Ganga-Jamuna Theatre Festival. Both shows of *Pragoitihashik* were attended by houseful of audiences. Presence of Manik Bandyopadhyay's son Shukanto Bandyopadhyay at the Academy of Fine Arts Stage was an added attraction. He was impressed by our production."

To draw more viewers Nagorik Natyangan is planning to reintroduce matinee shows in the country. The reason behind this move, according to Lucky Enam, "*Pragoitihashik* is included as a text at colleges and universities, so we invited students to watch the play. But, the students living in the dormitories cannot attend



Hridi Haque and co-artist in *Pragoitihashik*

the evening shows due to several problems. This is why we decided to stage matinee shows on holidays, which would be convenient for the students. Matinee shows used to be a regular

affair years ago. We want to reintroduce it now. We will stage two shows of *Pragoitihashik* at 4 pm and 7 pm at the Mahila Samity Stage."

Classical dance at Chhayanat

A classical dance programme, in aid of Sidr victims, was arranged by cultural personalities Aly Zaker and Sara Zaker at Chhayanat Shangskriti Bhaban recently, says a press release. Expatriate artiste Priya Karim Chisti performed *Bharat Natyam* at the programme.

Priya Karim's performance is an abbreviated version of the *Aranghetram* (graduation performance), which she presented in California on September 15, 2007. Her rendition included *Pushpanjali*, *Jatiswaran*, *Nataraj*, *Tillana* and *Mangalam*.

Priya is delighted and honoured to share her artistic skills with the dance enthusiasts in

Bangladesh. She hopes to participate in many such cultural programmes in future -- both in Bangladesh and abroad.

Priya dedicated her performance to the Sidr victims and her short-lived cousin Maysa Karim. Priya started her *taalim* under Guru Viji Prakash in Los Angeles when she was only five. The dancer said that she is always inspired by her parents and guru.

President of Chhayanat, Sanjida Khatun was also present at the programme. Noted dancer Lubna Mariam, Minu Haq, Anisul Islam Hiru and Belayet Hossain Khan spoke highly of Priya's performance.



Priya Karim

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DJ With
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