

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Poetry Recital

Celebrating 155th birth anniversary of Russian Playwright Alexander Ostrovsky and 147th birth anniversary of Rabin Dranath Tagore. **Organiser:** Jyoti Kati. **Venue:** Exhibition Hall of Russian Centre for Science and Culture, House 510, Rd 7, Dharmad. **Date:** May 13. **Time:** 6pm



Workshop and Exhibition 2008

Special show of art works by participants of the workshop conducted by eminent artist Shahid Kabir. **Title:** Egg Tempara. **Venue:** Zainul Gallery, Institute of Fine Arts, DU. **Date:** May 11-17



Art Exhibition

Title: Symphony In Drawing. **Artist:** Ranjit Das. **Venue:** Shilpangan Gallery, H 26, R 3, Dhanmondi. **Date:** May 14-28. **Time:** 10am-1pm and 5pm-8pm



Solo Ceramic Exhibition

Title: Innovative Beauty in Ceramics. **Artist:** Afroja Chowdhury Happy. **Venue:** Zainul Gallery, Institute of Fine Arts, DU. **Date:** May 10-16. **Time:** 12pm-8pm



Lost in a city of temples

KARIM WAHEED

When I first saw the *shikhar* of the Shiv Temple in Puthia, I was embarrassed. Embarrassed for a number of reasons -- mostly because I had no idea something of this stature exists in Bangladesh. Should I blame myself single-handedly? I could but then again, growing up most of us didn't read about it. Our textbooks mentioned the few obvious "archaeological treasures" like Sonargaon, Paharpur, Mahastangar or Mainamati. Perhaps there was a vague reference or some minuscule, fuzzy sketch of the Puthia Rajbari.

Interestingly enough, the colossal Rajbari -- which now houses a college -- is not the most impressive existing structure (archaeologically or architecturally) in the locale.

Finding Puthia was another story. Apart from the above mentioned familiar sites, our Department of Archaeology does not believe in accommodating tourists. Can't really blame them though; necessary funds have not been allocated -- that's the usual complaint. Perhaps, that fact that tourism is one of the most lucrative industries in the world now, hasn't registered yet.

Puthia is about 23 kms east of Rajshahi. Since there is no sign, you have to ask around for directions.

The view of the Shiv Temple is spectacular enough to overwhelm the fatigued traveller. Next to it is a single-domed octagonal temple, which according to Bishwanath (a caretaker appointed by the Department of Archaeology), was used by the zamindars.

Legends narrate a simpler time when a Sattwik Brahman named Vatsacharya set up an *ashram* in the area. Supposedly, a Mughal general with his army came here to collect taxes. In those days, soldiers were called "laskhar". According to another story, Nilambar received the title of "Raja" from Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Locals believe the region was once called "Lashkarpur Pargana" (a reference to the Mughal connection). A partition of the estate took place in 1744 when the eldest son received a five-and-half *anna* share while three others received three-and-half *anna* each. The Puthia Raj estate maintained its existence till the abolition of the zamindari system under the East Pakistan Estate Acquisition Act of 1950.

According to the Bishwanath, there was a subtle "friendly" rivalry among the zamindar families who tried to outdo each other by commissioning the spectacular temples and palaces.

The temples were named after the particular worshipped deities -- Shiv Temple, Govinda

Temple, Radha-Govinda Temple, Dol Temple and Anahik Temple for instance.

According to the locals, the archaeological splendour of Puthia is unrivalled in the country. Not really an overstatement, considering the nine existing temples; four have turned into rubble and no trace of two whatsoever.

The Shiv Temple was commissioned by Rani Bhubanamayi Devi in 1823 (according to the brochure provided by the temple). The temple, on a high platform, is of the *panchagruha* type -- not typically Bengali in style. The design of the ground floor is Islamic. Walls of the *garbhagriha* or the "sanctum sanctorum" features stone reliefs, which were defaced by the Pakistani soldiers during the Liberation War. Huge slabs of stone are missing from the floor. The intricate carvings that remain are awe-inspiring.

The Dol Temple (built in 1895), just minutes away from the Shiv Temple, is a square structure with a pyramidal appearance. It is open on all four sides and resembles the Rasa Mancha of Bishnupur, India. The temple has been whitewashed recently and the ground floor is currently an untidy storage unit with piled up sacks. The view from the top floor can help visualise why the temple is located in the middle of the town; it was perhaps used to display statues of gods and goddesses during festivals.

The Rajbari is in a sorry shape. Rani Hemantakumari Devi had the Rajbari built in 1895, in honour of her mother-in-law Saratsundari Devi. Using the Rajbari as a college has put the derelict edifice in further jeopardy -- signs of blatant indiscretion everywhere.

The Govinda Temple (built sometime between 1823 and 1895) -- within the Rajbari courtyard -- features elaborate terracotta work on the facade. It resembles the Kantaji Temple (Dinajpur). A unique feature is the central tower with four smaller towers in the corners, called the "char chala". An earthquake wiped out two other adjacent temples long ago. The terracotta walls depict mythical stories, Radha-Krishna images and epic battle scenes.

Walking around, we came across some octagonal rooms -- weeds shooting from the walls, went through a grand portico of a villa that is now a safe haven for a family of hooded cobras.

Sides of the Anahik Temples have been painted -- I earnestly hoped not on terracotta motifs.

A trip to this city of temples left me lost. I was lost trying to find it; at a loss trying to figure out why this place that has all the potential to become a tourist hotspot is still left underexposed and can't comprehend why this archaeological treasure trove is left uncared for.



A view of the Shiv Temple from across the adjacent dighi



The skyline of Puthia; the Dol Temple (right) has been recently whitewashed

PHOTO: FLICKR.COM



Arches in the Shiv Temple



Terracotta details



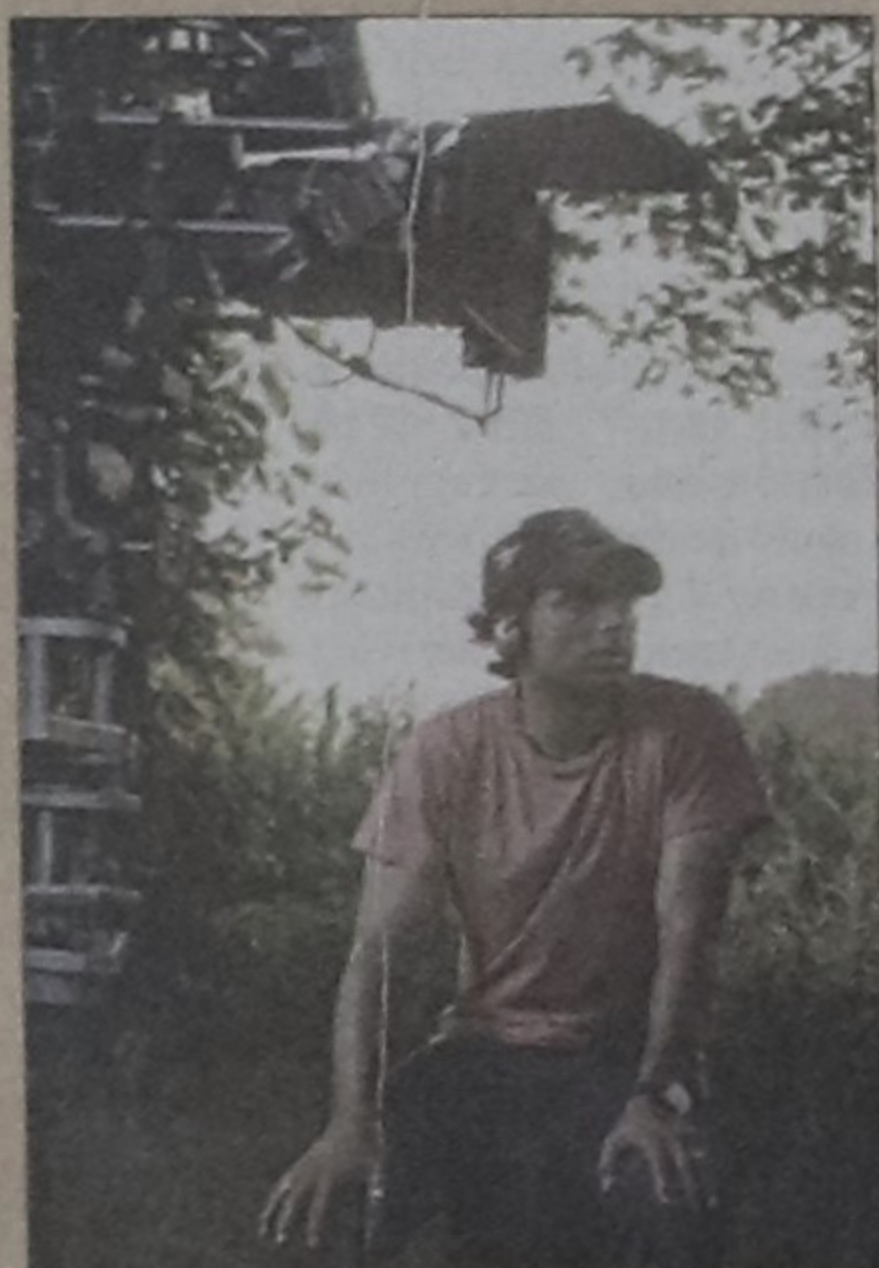
The Govinda Temple



The octagonal temple

"The choice of the genre is not on my agenda"

-- Manoj Night Shyamalan



Manoj Night Shyamalan

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India-born Hollywood director Manoj Night Shyamalan says he loves to scare viewers of his films but would have us believe that he does not consciously choose Sci-Fi genre.

"The choice of the genre is not on my agenda. I just think of a subject and it turns out to be of Sci-Fi genre. It's just that I love to scare people," says the director now in India promoting his forthcoming movie *The Happening* that is set to hit the screens worldwide on June 13.

Shyamalan's previous movies like *The Village* and *Lady in the Water* did not earn critical appreciation nor impress the audience much.

However, Shyamalan claims he is not worried about criticism and would stick passionately to his work savaged by critics.

To a question about the standing of directors of Indian origin in Hollywood, Shyamalan said, "If the screenplay is good, it does not matter who you are and where you are from." As for himself, the director says, "I find myself accepted in Hollywood."

UTV Chief Executive Officer Ronny Screwvala said *The Happening* was the most high-profile Asian film co-production with a US studio budgeted at \$7 million dollars.

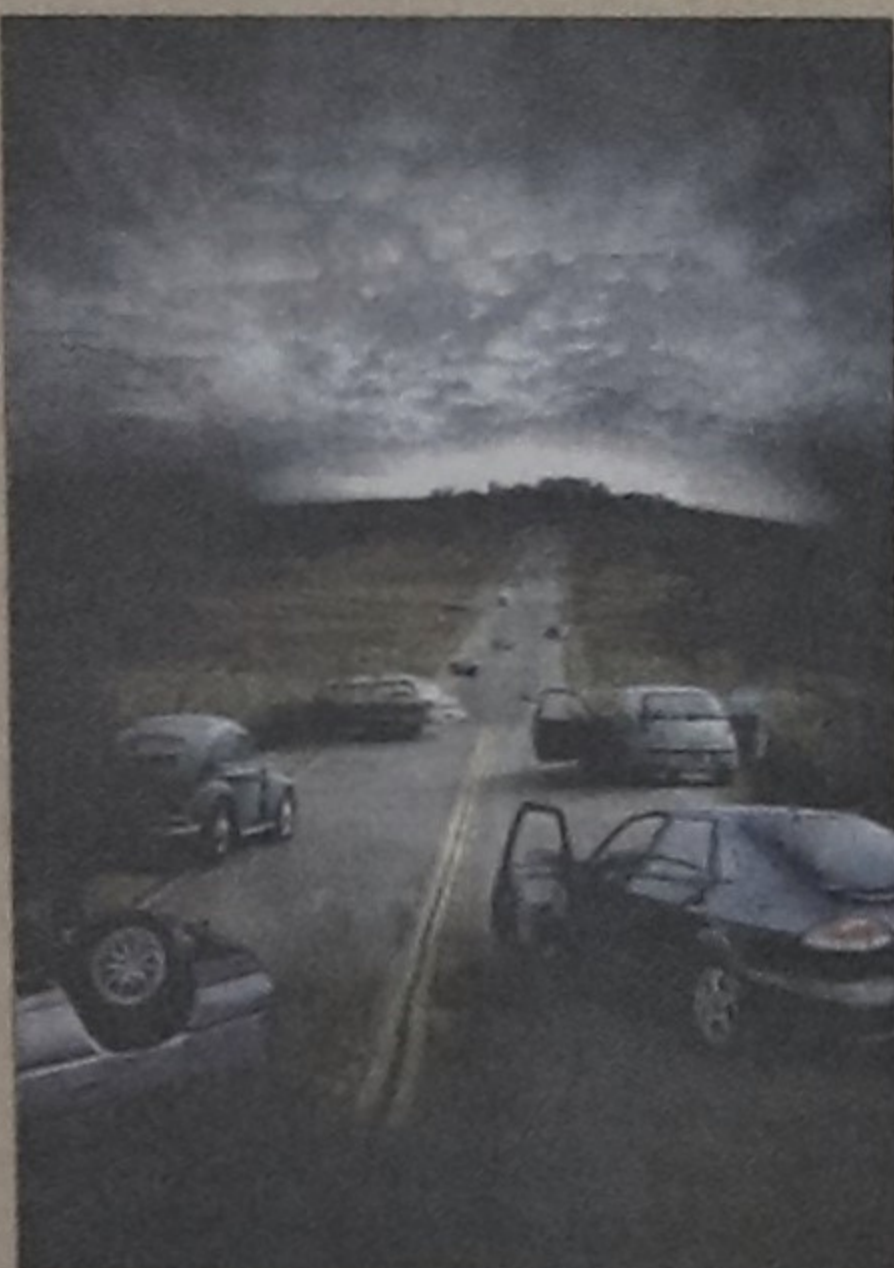
Shyamalan has appeared in cameo roles in his films but does he aspire to play lead roles at some point of time? The director says he has been getting offers from other directors but playing such roles was not physically possible for him.

Even as Shyamalan is looking forward to the response to *The Happening*, he is already busy with his next film *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, inspired by a Japanese children's animation series.

Asked why he chooses Hollywood action heroes like Mel Gibson (in *Signs*), Bruce Willis (in *The Sixth Sense*) and Mark Wahlberg (as an ordinary school teacher on the run from a natural disaster that threatens the world in *The Happening*) for non-action roles, Shyamalan says he enjoys casting them in "surprising" roles.

"I like to cast action heroes not in action roles because they still infuse a kind of energy to the film," says the director.

That Shyamalan passionately believes in the kind of movies he makes is evident from his dour defence of them. Although his *Lady in the Water*, the story of a nymph living in a chamber beneath a swimming pool, flopped, he rates it as his best movie.

A scene from *The Happening*

Sixth Sense, *Signs*, *Unbreakable* and *The Village* are known for their supernatural storylines and he says *The Happening* is "a bit like Alfred Hitchcock's *Birds*".

Shot extensively in the East Coast of the United States, in particular Philadelphia, Shyamalan's hometown, *The Happening*, starring Oscar-nominated actor Mark Wahlberg, Zoëy Deschanel and Spencer Breslin, focuses on man's presence on Earth and explores the environment as the victim of his villainy.

The release of *The Happening*, a joint production of India's UTV Motion Pictures and Hollywood studio major 20th Century Fox, is important for Shyamalan because his

Power dressing: Exhibition at the Met inspired by superheroes

Superheroes exist for many reasons. Certainly in our time they exist to sell movie tickets and plastic action figures. But superheroes, those crusading men and women in tights, allow us to believe that in a cape or magical second skin we can do the impossible. We can transform ourselves.

Fashion thrives on the same expectation: Buy this hot dress or pair of Jimmy Choos, and see if you don't feel curiously invincible at the next party. To an extent all superheroes, like some of the most flamboyant creatures in fashion, are playing a role inadvertently thrust on them by circumstance, their true identities and physical shortcomings concealed.

The ideas that dominate fashion -- identity, performance, gender, body shapes, sexuality, logos and the quest for state-of-the-art materials -- pretty well describe the world of the superhero.

These two forces are brought together in "Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy," the Metropolitan Museum of Art's playful look at comic book costumes and their influence on radical haute couture as well as high-tech sportswear. Organised by Andrew Bolton, curator of the Met's Costume Institute, the exhibition is a departure from the museum's lavish historical surveys. This is the lighter, more fantastical side of fashion, an industry that loves to talk about the genius of Balenciaga while clamouring to dress the body of Beyoncé. Yet inevitably fashion is pioneered by the young, by their daydreams and obsessions, and this exhibition may open one's eyes to new modes of style as surely as a fur-lined teacup or a slashed punk T-shirt depicting the British queen.

The notion of experiment is embodied in the design, which was

The Spider-Man display includes Tobey Maguire's costume from *Spider-Man 3* and cobweb knit, web-embroidered ensembles

done by Nathan Crowley, the production designer on two Batman films and the exhibition's creative consultant. The 60 outfits, many from movies, are displayed in a sleek, white, brightly illuminated space that suggests a laboratory. All that clinical whiteness, along with three sections of mirrors arranged to create an endless reflection, helps to set off the extreme materials of the costumes and the vivid Gotham backdrops.

Superheroes emerged in the late 1930s, the hinge years between the misery of the Great Depression and the start of World War II.

Wonder Woman, created by William Moulton Marston, first appeared against a patriotic Washington skyline in January 1942. The drawn version -- unlike Lynda Carter's television character with her 22-inch waist and ample bust -- looks wholesome and cute in her flirty star-patterned skirt and bustier. Clark Kent, when trouble loomed, slipped out of his street clothes and into Superman's sleek, empowering unitard. But the 1930s also marked the

introduction of a streamlined modernity in interior design, automobiles and the fashion of couturiers like Madeleine Vionnet, whose dresses flowed like liquid over the skin. For contemporary designers like Jean Paul Gaultier, who did a printed version of the unitard in 1995, the attraction of a comic hero's "second skin" may be that it looks modern.

Quite a few of the fashion interpretations of superhero costumes here are fairly literal and do little to expand our knowledge of either form of expression. Bernhard Willhelm's 2006 Superman-inspired dress features an S logo that appears to be dematerialising in drips of red, while a Moschino three-piece suit from 2006 sports a T-shirt emblazoned with a red M. But beyond commenting on the proliferation of logos and branding, what do these garments tell us?

In the Spider-Man display, which includes Tobey Maguire's costume from "Spider-Man 3," there are a number of cobweb knit and web-embroidered ensembles.

Some of these show finesse and sly humour, like a 1990 Giorgio Armani gown traced in silk threads and crystal beads. But you can't really know if this design springs from the natural world or a comic book, and you are left simply to marvel at its creepy beauty -- which may be enough.

It's camp. But when these pieces were first shown on a Paris runway they were unfairly dismissed as crass, and Mugler's motives were questioned. There was very little attempt to understand the themes of violence and eroticism conveyed in the style. Certainly these ideas are the basis for a lot of contemporary art and literature. You have to wonder if the reason Mugler didn't receive serious consideration is that he was a dressmaker.

Designers liberate themselves from the banal just as superheroes do. They do remarkable things with materials and craft. Dolce & Gabbana's corseted minidress from 2007 looks as if it were moulded from Tiffany silver. It is actually made of leather. Although it would have been nice to see more clothing examples from the 1960s and '70s, and more abstract takes on transformation -- where is Comme des Garçons, the avant-garde label of Rei Kawakubo? -- Bolton intelligently connects these two distinct worlds.

And while it's surprising that only two American designers are included in the exhibition -- Rick Owens and As Four -- it is also understandable. Superheroes are largely an American invention, and designers here are probably too close to Catwoman and the Flash to be inspired in a new or funny way. Their fantasies involve England or Rome, not Krypton.

Source: The New York Times