

## Iftar in a different setting

Savouring the rural delicacies

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

Nowadays, when one looks at the front page of the national dailies or the TV screen, one can hardly be unaware of the frenzied consumers and not feel the pulse of the denizens at the shopping arcades. Makeshift stalls and restaurants are selling the mouth-watering *iftar* items ranging from *jilebi*, *haalim*, *dahi-bara* and many more. Ramadan is on.

But, I wonder why there are no pictures of how Ramadan is observed in villages!

My memory takes me back to my early visits to Sujabad, my ancestral home in Barisal, in our younger days and how we observed Ramadan.

After a nightlong journey, the big steamer 'Kiwi' finally docked at the shores of Barisal at dawn. From there, we boarded a boat for the final leg of the journey. The boat was clean and spacious enough to be comfortable even for our large group.

As the boat started off towards Sujabad, we all rushed to the deck to breathe in the fresh breeze from the river.

The trip was a long-awaited one for the whole family. We had planned to spend some days of Ramadan with our grandparents at our ancestral home. And our eager grandparents could hardly wait for our huge 'troop' of cousins, nieces and nephews to arrive.

The sighting of the moon was always a special event. We made fun wagers on who would spot it first. That night we would gather in the attic to catch a glimpse of the elusive silver crescent. As someone spotted it, we all scrambled towards that end to get a closer look of the 'thin strand' -- the new moon. The echoes of *Azaan* from the mosque heralded the start of Ramadan. The firecrackers went off next, probably some miles away. In the villages this was another simple way to spread the word!

The *mehedi* (henna) leaves had already been crushed and prepared into a fine paste. Then would begin the mad rush to



have the most 'artistic' aunt make flowery designs on our palms and arms with the vermilion *mehedi*. While some got busy preparing dinner for the guests (with the greatest dexterity so as not to smudge the fresh *mehedi*), others left for the family mosque for prayers.

At night, we huddled around the fire in the centre of the yard, as the tantalising aroma of kebabs and a long session of

songs from bygone days put us in a festive mood. The food ranged from *paturi* (prawns wrapped and baked in banana leaves), fried fish, to *polau*, steamed rice and thick *daal*, fresh vegetables, salads, pickles and desserts. Grandparents being grandparents, we could not leave the table without tasting every item.

Soon after, we would settle in for the night. Dinner would be served early, so by 3 o'clock in the

up with full vigour thanks to the magic of the riverside air. While the boys took to chess and carom, the girls would lend a hand to *dadijan* (grandma) in preparing meals for the evening.

It was always a festive event not for just one household but for the entire neighbourhood. We helped the shy neighbourhood *bous* (new brides) who came over to help with the grinding of rice and spices. Some would accompany the elders to the nearby pond where fishermen were busy catching the king prawns and the *ruhi* fish. As the daylight faded away, it would be time for a hearty *iftar*.

In the family room, a big *dastarkhan* (linen) with neat embroidery was laid out on the floor. Glasses were filled with fresh lime juice, *tokma*, *lassi* or sweet coconut water. This was followed by *piazu*, *muri*, *chhola*, *alu puri*, *dal puri* and, last but not the least, *moa* (puffed rice balls with molasses) and a variety of *pithas* (rice cakes) coated in date juice and thick milk. Nothing would please *daadajan* (grandpa) more than the dates and *chhola* with ginger and green chillies. Flattened rice *chira* and curd were what he said cooled the system after a long day of fasting.

Besides the rich array of delicacies, what moved me most was the way neighbours would join in, stop by for a chat, arrange for *iftar* together, and simply enjoy each other's company. Elders would complain about the price of food, boys about who caught the largest fish, and young girls -- well there was no end to the chatter! It was not simply a quick *iftar* and rush off to watch TV, it was a time for bonding after a long day.

As we boarded our boat for the return trip, the happy visions of my family remained with me. Many years on, many miles away, I still hold dear those experiences. And for those of us who have enjoyed similar times, we know it's a time that will be cherished forever.

The article is a reprint from an earlier version.

## Eid Special

### "Biye Ebong Amader Golpo" on Banglavision

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

As part of the special programmes on Eid, Banglavision will telecast single episode TV play *Biye Ebong Amader Golpo* on the third day of Eid at 11:20 pm. Written by Faruk Hossain and directed by Taher Shipon the play revolves around a young couple who decide to get married but are uncertain about their future.

There is a saying that love marriages are often the unsuccessful ones. After seeing many marriages dissolve, Immi is worried about the future of her relationship with Sohel. The couple try to figure out the reasons behind unsuccessful marriages and realise that lack of understanding often turns relationships sour. To deal with this issue the couple turns to a councillor. The councillor wants to test the couple that will decide their



(From left) Joy, Sumaiya Shimu and Chitrlekha Guha in *Biye Ebong Amader Golpo*.

mutual understanding. The outcome of the test will decide whether they should go forward with the wedding or not. Desperate to pass the test, the couple

hand each other a list of their likes and dislikes. Immi and Sohel memorise the list and face the test. The cast includes Joy, Sumaiya Shimu and Chitrlekha Guha.

## TV Watch

### Drama serial "Shonalu Phul" on ATN Bangla

Cultural Correspondent

Drama serial *Shonalu Phul* will be aired tonight on ATN Bangla at 8pm. Written by Kazi Shahidul Islam and directed by Ashraf Alam Ripon, this is the fourth episode of the new drama serial.

The story begins when the corpse of a top terrorist named Nazim is discovered in an abandoned pond. Consequently, reporters flock to the young widow of Nazim, Dipabali Mizan, a journalist working for the daily *Nabakaal*, is among them. Though Mizan writes a humane story about the bereavement of the young woman who became a widow before she could experience conjugal life, his reporter's instinct smells a rather different reality. Mizan becomes interested to discover how the one-month conjugal life of Dipabali really was.

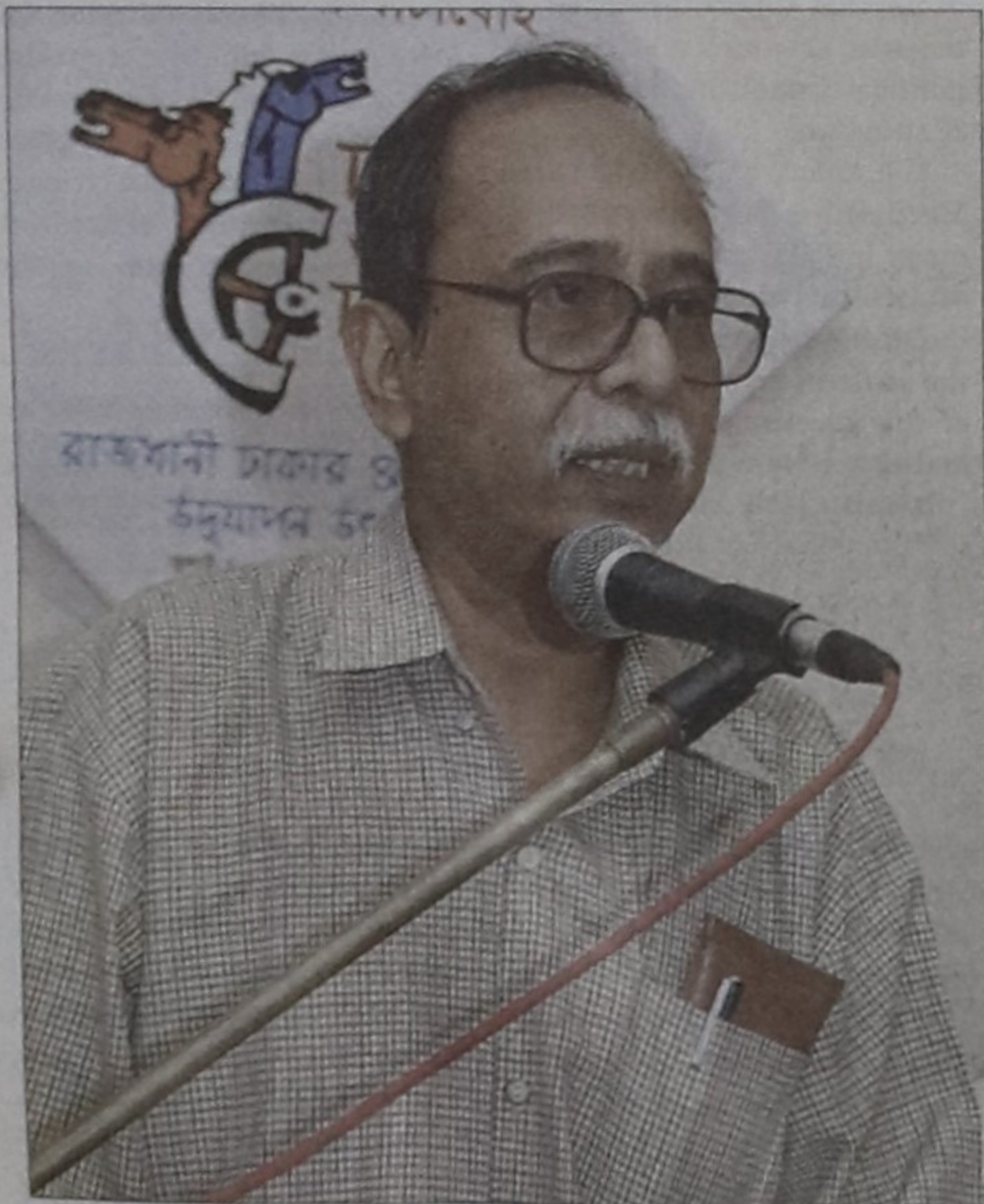
Sumaiya Shimu, Apurbo, Hillol and others play the lead roles in the serial.



Apurbo (right) and co-actor in *Shonalu Phul*.

## Buzz

### Theme song for "Dhaka Amar Dhaka" launched



Muntahir Mamun speaks at the album launch.

A theme song for the two-year celebration of Dhaka's 400th anniversary titled *Dhaka Amar Dhaka* has been recorded recently. The launching ceremony of the song titled *Dhaka amar ahongkarer Dhaka* was held at the Bengal Cafe, Bengal Shilpalay on September 20, says a press release.

Eminent artists of the country Sabina Yasmin, Andrew Kishore, Baby Nazneen, Monir Khan and

others have performed in the song. Written by Mohammad Rafiquzzaman, the song was set to tune by noted composer Alauddin Ali.

Renowned educationist Dr. Rafiqul Islam was the chief guest at the launching programme. Azim Baksh, director of Dhaka Kendra, inaugurated the event. Journalist Sagar Lohani was the MC.

A one-minute silence was observed at the event, honouring



(From left) Alauddin Ali, Andrew Kishore and Sabina Yasmin at the recording of the song.

the recently deceased theatre icon Abdullah Al Mamun and lyricist Mohammad Moniruzzaman. Researcher Muntahir Mamun and singer Baby Nazneen, among others, spoke at the event. Baby Nazneen welcomed the initiative to compose a song on Dhaka City in her speech while Muntahir Mamun urged everyone to come forward to make the festival celebrating 400 years of the city a success. He also appealed to the guests and atten-

dants to unite and save the river Buriganga.

Among others, veteran playwright Sayeed Ahmed, researcher Hashem Sufi, singer Monir Khan, music director Alauddin Ali and social activist Farah Kabir attended the programme.

The festival, *Dhaka Amar Dhaka*, is being organised by 'Dhaka-400 Bachhar Puri Utsab Nagarik Committee.'

### "Taare Zameen Par" to represent India at the Oscars

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Will Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan be third time lucky? Will he break India's Oscar jinx? These are the questions doing the rounds in the Indian cinema industry after Bollywood "Taare Zameen Par", starring Bollywood superstar Khan as an actor-producer-director, was chosen as the country's official entry for the Oscar award in the best foreign language category.

The Film Federation of India made the announcement on Saturday evening. Aamir Khan's movie, which is the story of a child afflicted with dyslexia (learning disability) and his bonding with his teacher (played by Aamir), earned a lot of critical acclaim and mass popularity after its release last year. It also marks Khan's directorial debut.

This is the third time that a film starring Aamir Khan has been nominated for the Oscars. In 2001, Ashutosh Gowariker-directed superhit movie "Lagaan" starring Aamir as its lead actor and producer, was nominated for the same year but failed to make it after being shortlisted for the first five in the final lap of the race. Five years later, another film Aamir-starrer "Rang De Basanti", directed by Rakesh Omprakash Mehra, was nominated for the Oscars in 2006 and this too failed to win the award.

An elated Aamir Khan, now shooting in Ladakh for Raju Hirani's movie "Three Idiots" reacted to Oscar nomination by saying that "Taare Zameen Par" is a "film that is extremely close to my heart. It's a film that first sensitized me as a parent and as person and then went on to have same effect on all the audience in India and across the globe. I hope that it has an equally strong impact on the members of the Academy as

well." Film Federation of India (FFI) chairperson Suneel Darshan, who led this year's ten-member jury committee for the Oscars nomination, said "Taare Zameen Par" was selected from among nine Indian movies like Ashutosh Gowariker's "Jodhaa Akbar", Neeraj Pandey-directed "A Wednesday", Nishikant Kamat's "Mumbai Meri Jaan", Abhishek Kapoor's "Rock On" and Subhash Ghai's "Black & White". Two Marathi and one Telugu language films were also in contention for the nomination.

The nomination of "Taare Zameen Par" is without any controversy, unlike last year when India's official entry "Eklavya" starring Amitabh Bachchan and Saif Ali Khan among others, had kicked off a row for its quality. Indian films have so far drawn a blank at the Oscars and the country's only achievement at the Oscar nights are maestro Satyajit Ray's getting the Lifetime Achievement award and Bhanu Athaiya's award for best costume designing in Sir Richard Attenborough's film "Gandhi".

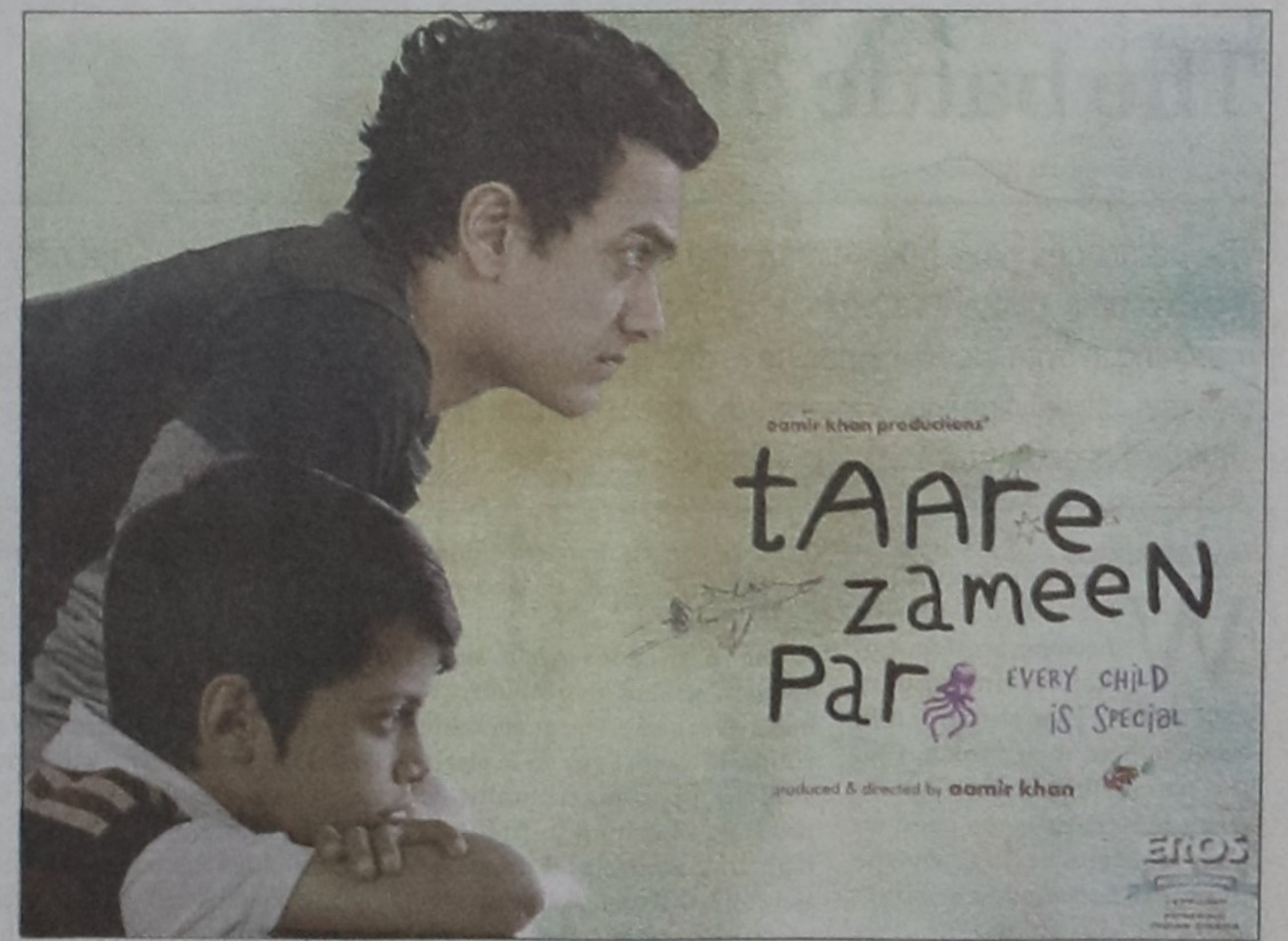
Will Aamir Khan be third time lucky to break the glass ceiling at the Oscars? We have to wait for the answer till February 22, 2009. Meanwhile, Marathi film

"Tingya", which lost out to "Taare Zameen Par" for Oscar nomination, is likely to be sent for the Academy awards as an independent entry, its producer Ravi Rai said.

The film is a story about a six-year-old boy's love for his bull in the backdrop of agrarian crisis in Maharashtra state.

Rai said "Tingya" was not selected because it lacked technical finesse but added the content of the film is more important.

He takes heart from the fact that "Life is Beautiful" won the Oscar in the best foreign language category in 1998 as an independent entry.



Ameer Khan and Darsheel Safary in *Taare Zameen Par*.