A Roman Boishakh

NEEMAN SOBHAN

If I asked you to imagine a group of Italian boys and girls dancing to a Bengali folk song, you would probably smile indulgently. But if I said that right now, I have in my living room half a dozen Italian university students--- young men and women in their early twenties, dancing away a storm to 'Allah Megh Dey Paani dey' while singing under their breath: *'Asman hoilo tutta tutta, jomeen hoilo phata, megh raja ghumaiya roisey, megh dibo tor kaida?'* you would either burst into laughter or not believe the scenario.



But it is absolutely true. And the amazing fact is that in only three sessions of being taught the dance, these first year Italian students from my Bengali class at La Sapienza university, are executing the steps so well and with such gusto that for the last few days our Roman sky has been sending down spring showers and covered in rain clouds.

I am naturally thrilled to see 'my kids' dancing in perfect unison and without missing a single beat. But I am even more excited that a vision I had conceived in an inspired moment, of making non-Bengalis take part in our culture, is becoming a reality.

A few weeks ago, I was asked to help with a Pohela Boishakh cultural programme for a select international audience, organised with the collaboration of the Bangladesh embassy and some of the families of the UN agencies in Rome. I decided right then that my contribution to the programme would be a group of my Italian students whom I would train to dance to a Bengali song.

I have always felt that in the teaching and learning of a language, music, poetry and dance are wonderful catalysts to the learning process. This would be my experiment to prove my point. Three sessions of practice into the dance number, I already think that, touch wood, my project is halfway into success. The rest, of course, is to be seen at the actual performance, to be staged it an auditorium at the end of the month.

14 April is the Bengali new year, but it also happens to be the Easter week-end, and to avoid clashing with this