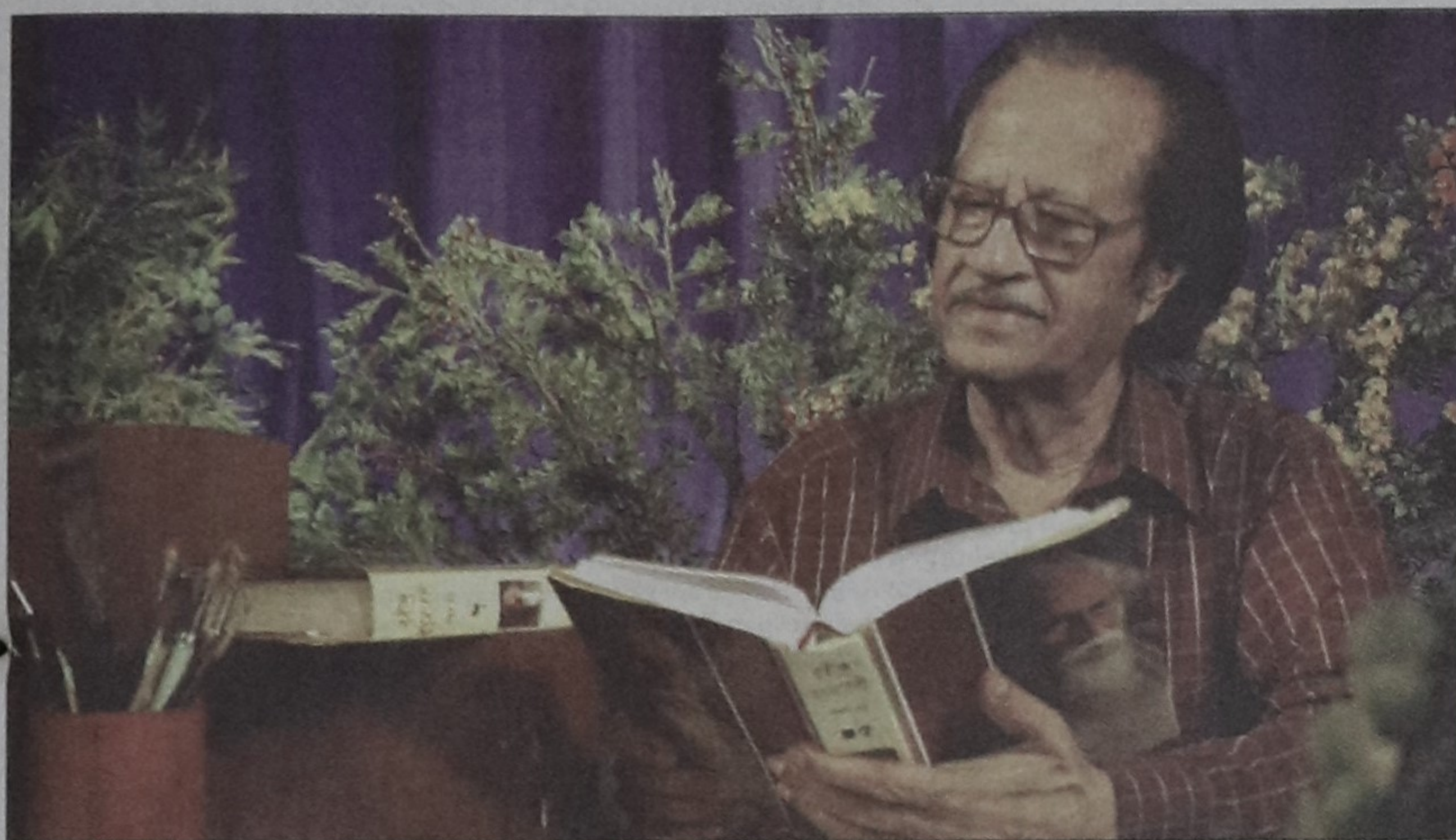


A New Dawn

From village meadows to city streets

Mustafa Monwar goes over the evolution of Baishakhi celebration



KARIM WAHEED

"Contrary to what many assume, the tradition of 'Pahela Baishakh' (first day of the Bengali new year) celebration in urban areas, in particular Dhaka, wasn't a sudden implant in the 1960s," says renowned cultural personality and artist Mustafa Monwar.

"The magnitude of the celebration may have changed, new trends have developed over the decades but 'Pahela Baishakh' has been and will remain one of the most authentic secular Bengali festivals," he adds.

"I remember Baishakhi celebrations in Hooghly (West Bengal) in 1945. Along with other kids, I'd get 'mishti' (sweets). Traders would open 'hal khata' (ledgers). People from remote villages would come to the nearest small towns where 'Baishakhi Mela' (fairs) were held. It encouraged local craftsmen and vendors. People tried to get new clothes for the occasion, but nothing garish though. The impact of 'Swadeshi' (anti-Raj movement) was still profound in everyday life. Mostly

'Khadi' clothes were worn," Monwar reminisces.

"I suppose that'd be the major difference in how 'Pahela Baishakh' used to be celebrated in olden days with the way it's commemorated now -- grandeur or the tendency to show off," the veteran artist continues. "In rural Bengal, the first day of the year was marked with celebrating the harvest. It was a way of conveying gratitude for nature's bounties. The celebration was modest, mostly confined to the peripheries of the homes; in the meadows 'mela' would be on. Nothing like the pomp and public display of merriment that we see today on city streets."

"The fads in the cities include having 'panta-bhat' (a once-a-year phenomenon for most), colour coordinated (often designer) outfits etc -- 'traditions' that have more to do with showing off.

"I don't see anything wrong with this urban trend of showing off though. The razzle-dazzle is appropriate in the cities to bring everyone together, as the social and personal distances among us continue to grow."

Monwar was one of the initiators of 'Baishakhi Shobhajatra' in Dhaka. "The 'Baishakhi Celebration' we see in Dhaka has evolved over the last few decades. In the '60s (during the Pakistan era), we felt the need to celebrate our Bengali identity. Chhayanat's 'Baishakhi' musical programme at Ramna should be considered a catalyst for that movement. Everything evolved around that. Carnivals or cavalcades are very popular throughout the world. The 'shobhajatra' on 'Pahela Baishakh' certainly added to the festivity. What I also find endearing is the growing popularity of 'Lakkhi-shora,' 'tyapa-putul' and other local art objects.

"On the whole, I'm content with the current urban version of 'Pahela Baishakh,' as it has retained its secular Bengali essence. What's disconcerting though is a waning in the tradition in our rural areas. Perhaps it's financial strains or misguided religious inhibitions. But it's necessary that we look into this issue right away," Monwar says.

Baishakhi fashion

Chandra Shekhar Saha talks about changing trends

JAMIL MAHMUD

'Pahela Baishakh,' the first day of the Bengali calendar, is a festive occasion. What makes it remarkable is that it brings all sections of the society under one umbrella and is widely celebrated through South and Southeast Asia: Bangladesh, India and Nepal (based on the Hindu solar calendar that commences in mid-April of the Gregorian year), as well as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand.

In our country, people gear up for the festival by going on a shopping spree -- opting particularly for new and fashionable attire.

Celebrated fashion designer and artist Chandra Shekhar Saha believes this trend is not a fruit of a few days; it has developed over the last decade. He finds three important initiatives -- Chhayanat's musical soiree at Ramna, BSCIC's Baishakhi fair and 'mangal shobhajatra' by the students of Charukala -- that collectively manifests the day's significance. In a recent interview with The Daily Star prior to Pahela Baishakh 1416, Saha went over this evolution of the fashion market.

"Though the initiatives began at various points of time, collectively they have played an important role in bringing people together over the last 10 years," said Saha, pointing to the initiatives by Chhayanat, BSCIC and Charukala.

Saha observes rapid changes in the field of fashion designing. He asserts that over the years fashion houses have adopted two forms of designs prior to Pahela Baishakh: first, traditional motifs on their products and second, experimentation with materials and colours. "Though attire, primarily in red and white, have traditionally been popular, in vogue today are lighter shades of those two colours. Off-white, maroon, purple and other reddish colours now find a place in wardrobes alongside basic red and white. Fashionable attire are fatua, T-shirts and salwar-kameez rather than the conventional saris, lungi and panjabi," he says.

Saha has worked over the last 35 years in the field of fashion design. This year, he has conceptualised Kay Kraft's Baishakhi attire and greeting cards. The collection has been designed by a group of artistes and based on terracotta plaques from the walls of Kantaji temple. The greeting card, designed by Nisar Hossain, depicts 'Lokhi-shora' from Manikganj. This year's Baishakhi collection of Nitya Upahar is also Saha's brainchild.

Saha observes that the rural lifestyle filters into the city on Pahela Baishakh as "people go out to what is akin to a village fair." Besides, he adds, foodies enjoy a feast of 'panta-illish' and 'deshi' sweets.

Saha hopes that the young too will be enthusiastic about this colourful festival. "If we want to keep our art and culture alive then among our festivals we must give pride of place to Pahela Baishakh," he says.



Highlights: Special attractions on small screen

A run-down of special programmes on TV channels on Pahela Baishakh:

ATN Bangla

Borshoboron in Chittagong: From 6am ATN Bangla will air "Borsho Boron Utshob" live from Chittagong DC hall.

Rupantor: Bangla feature film "Rupantor" will be aired at 3:15 pm. The movie is directed by Abu Sayeed. Ferdous, Sakiba, Jayanto Chhatyapadhyay have done central characters in the movie.

Channel i

Borshoboron Utshob by Chhayanat: Channel i will air Chhayanat's "Borshoboron Utshob" live from Ramna Botomul, starting from 6am.

Brishti Bheja Akash: Bangla feature film "Brishti Bheja Akash" will be aired at 2:35 pm. Directed by Sohanur Rahman, the film features Moushumi, Ferdous, Shakil Khan in lead roles.



Khairul Anam Shakil and Rokaiya Hasina (right) perform on the show.

ntv

Hridoy Bina Jey Shur Bajey: Musical programme "Hridoy Bina Jey Shur Bajey" will be aired at 1:05 pm. Nazrul artiste Khairul Anam Shakil and Rokaiya Hasina will render songs of the five poets -- Tagore, Nazrul, D.L. Roy, Rajnikant and Atul Prasad.

Nokia Baishakhi Music Mela: From 4:30 pm, ntv will telecast "Nokia Baishakhi Music Mela" live from Banani. Popular bands Warfaze, Miles, Artcell, Dolchhut and singer-musician Arnob will perform at the concert.

BANGLAVISION

Brishti Othoba Kanna: Single-episode TV play "Brishti Othoba Kanna" will be aired at 9:05 pm. Written by Masud Hassan, the play has been directed by Parvez Amin. Tisha, Shajol and Immi have played the lead roles.

Baishakher Panktimala: "Baishakh-er Panktimala," featuring recitation, will be aired at 6:20 pm. Jayanto Chhatyapadhyay, Mahidul Islam, Naila Tarannum Chowdhury, Shimul Mustafa and Rafiqul Islam have recited on the show. The programme has been hosted by Rokeya Prachi.



A scene from "Rupantor"



Be a little extra conscious throughout the year to let women take their rightful positions. Let everyday be a day of celebration, a day of joy for all of us irrespective of whether we are men or women. Best wishes to everyone for the Bengali New Year 1416.



Empowering women
benefits the country & its people