



ANEELA HAQUE

**S**INCE childhood the first of Baishakh (Pahela Baishakh), April 14, always felt so festive, more than our religious festivals or haats or any fairs. For me, any festival regardless of religion, race, colour, caste, age etc., never made my brain so cluttered in terms of any celebration. So I celebrate everyday, every moment, as life comes with various colours and tunes.

It feels good when I have this "josh" as our youngsters label to live my life to the fullest...so everyday is Pahela Baishakh, Valentine's Day...just name any special dates from the global calendar and our local culture...it's the same. We just need a reason to enjoy a bit more on that very day....and why not? We are such romantic people with such romantic culture. Foreigners who ever visits our country always remembers Bangladesh for her PEOPLE....the shower of warmth and affection...and the art and culture revolving around....and the bright colours of our nature.

Yet, somehow, when it comes to Pahela Baishakh, the heart feels some unusual, enthralling rhythm....juggling tunes....beating drums in the midst of our crazy go life....in this JUNGLE ....the city !! Aah! The first rain....the new life to the green, to go more aesthetically romantic, to let us indulge into the profoundness....gazing at the galaxy. Oh Allaah, God, Bhagwan, Ishwar, Khuda....what a beautiful world YOU have created for us to cherish every second!!

Tagore poetry always influenced me in creating graphical prints in my humble "fashion" work ....quite a constant

inspiration....can't call it "fashion" but "Wearable Traditional Art With Modernity." I could never master singing Tagore without any training other than Indian Classical, Urdu Ghazals and Old Bangla songs....the reason is I applied Tagore poetry without the vocal part but with much romanticism and art giving my own "aneela" tune to Tagore's creations. My sarees, shirts, scarfs, traditional old style kameeze, blouses, chongha kurta, churidar and utorios...didn't leave any of Tagore's desired attires with much respect towards Mahatma Gandhi's khadi, Rajshahi silk, village cotton and tribal arty work!!

I had applied Tagore scripts on fabric 8 years back with much doubt how my Bangladeshi audience would react other than Internationals....guess the result became quite complementary facing much ditto copies at many design houses, shops, super markets, big craft brands over 2 years in Dhaka now...with much media publicity....calling their own aesthetics sometimes without any thought process....just like any new idea gets copied in any sector.

In 2004, my first bridal creations in Khadi was quite a stir in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh....do we really appreciate as a part of our strong heritage? It took me a while, yet my bold approach didn't fail....so I am such a proud global deshi that I simply can't let go my culture as "gone with the wind" !! Thanks to my audience who still kept it alive.

As Tagore says his creation is so "katha prodhan" that is 'word oriented' that you just have to give

enough suited tune to make his words more empowering and healing to feel every move...it should create much ripple in your heart to get carried away into his world creating your own...since I couldn't sing I created Tagore music on fashion...guess that is how I celebrated each and everyday with such vision...though I have preferences....the romantic poetry moves me the most....guess I live out of my dreams....and Tagore helps me to go romantic to think better....a little fancy, a little paradise in my own techy system to do better and stronger creation in straight colours....in a graphical manner being a professional graphic designer it helps the most.

According to tradition, Pahela Baishakh colours are straight red border white saree. I guess the white absorbs all the heat of the Baishakh and every soul dressed up from early morning appear to be some live doves everywhere...much peace everywhere...what a beauty...what aesthetics we Bangladeshi inherited as a culture....that we rock our world with Baul, Lalon, Marphoti, Bhatiyali, Jari, Jatra and more....besides Tagore and Nazrul shongeet. The ethnicity of the tribal colour culture is my other inspiration over years from my nationwide adventurous travels besides globe trotting...my biggest hobby...it is always a part of Pahela Baishakh creation for me.

The folk motifs of flower, fish, elephant, leaf, garden, bird, peacock on art and craft; pot chitra, painted pitchers, block designs, painted clay and wooden dolls, kula as winnowing fan,

shitol paati, various baskets, coconut shell buttons/jewelry, maduli, hand fans with embroidery, Lakshmi's sara (earthen pot) with motifs of elephant, bird, Lakshmi and Krishna, handkerchief, bags, glass bangles, shotoroni, shawls, madur (straw rugs), terracotta plaques, influenced by various religions....our heritage...all fused in one on this very day. Then there are Mughal Sonargaon muslin, Dhakai jamdani, Tangail taant, Komilla Gandhi khaadi, Rajshahi silk, North Bengal kanthas, gumcha, Grameen check, village cotton...with all traditional folk ritual art as alpana painting, ghazi's pot with village adventure stories depicted in symbols, earthen pot, sand pitchers, decorated with symbols of lily, duck, fish, flowers and geometric shapes....all these derived from nature and get presented in such festive form on this very Pahela Baishakh....wish we had these as reminders of our rich heritage in our daily life...in fact, can't we?

Besides all forms of art of our Bengali tradition we can't ignore our aesthetics on architectural heritage from which these motifs are derived as well as inspired by various religions. Daas are much influenced by the PUTHI scribes on banana leaf if you dig our heritage...this happened before offset press was invented...all intellectuals depended on such scribes....we being the techy product makes things easy when playing with such ideas on our creations.

To me Pahela Baishakh doesn't require any specific fashion shows as such the ramp is the common stage of the nationwide life, the commoners are

the models and their presentation in such beautiful colours of red, white, yellow, banana leaf green, sky blue are the colours of nature's catwalk...with simple terracotta jewelry and glass/clay straw bangles....our people are the models and our Traditional Heritage of textiles, arts and craft are our content of this live ramp...aren't we lucky? We have it all as a BRAND - "Bangladeshi" - so glad to see our people having interesting wardrobe with a variety of khadi, taant, village cotton, jamdani, silk and kanthas....if our people didn't promote these I don't think I could survive here....thanks to our people, made my life worth a living.

In fact, everyday should be a fashion catwalk for every soul...everyone should dress to kill. Pahela Baishakh is not only about the right attire as 'fashion'...it's the whole concept....getting everyone under one roof as one consortium sharing one culture....our heritage: music, theatre, dance, literature, art, textiles, craft and above all the security with law and order to enjoy our FREEDOM to welcome Bengali new year with much grace...just enjoy as ONE NATION with no labels of religion, race or colour.

So readers...celebrate everyday...with colours; red, yellow, blue, orange, green, purple...all the colours of our rainbow as you see after a slight rain...colour your life that way...life will feel beautiful like Pahela Baishakh everyday....and create your own world with much positivity.

Aneela Haque is graphic fashion designer and social activist.

# Akash bhora shurjo tara...

AMIRUL RAJU

## A day not to be missed

SHAMSI ARA HUDA

**T**HESE days we celebrate a very glossy, multihued and extravagant Pahela Baishakh. We arrange everything meticulously and the least mistake makes us terribly upset. We need exclusive saree and panjabi matching jewelry, food, transport, everything individual. And it has other way to anything but fulfilling our utmost satisfaction.

Although Pahela Baishakh is supposed to be an occasion for all classes of people, still the lower class can't enjoy it with full relish. However, it is encouraging to note that there are a lot of arrangements like open air concert, Baishakhi mela and so on which can be enjoyed without any cost (if only you can avoid the luxury of buying anything from mela). Dhaka residents never miss the celebration of Pahela Baishakh. Their not leaving Dhaka during the occasion no doubt

contributes to more traffic jam but we face it with the true spirit of Baishakh.

Some religious fundamentalists define the celebration of Baishakh as a part of Hinduism with which Islam has no connection at all. But culture is something which cannot be hemmed in any bondage. Culture is the existence of a nation itself on which its own national tradition is established. Those who are continuously active in creating a conflict between religion and culture are in fact behind all sorts of unlawful activities in the name of religion.

When I was a student there was no fear of such extremist elements. The places of Baishakh celebration were also limited. Dhaka University campus, Charukola Institute and Ramna Botomul were the only places for me. But now even with the terror of fundamentalists, Baishakhi programmes take place in a number of places like Rabindra Shorobor, Boshundhara Shopping Mall, different academic institutions, different clubs, different cultural academy premises, different theme parks, different

restaurants and so on. The increasing rate of participation is also apparently a manifestation of Bangali's cultured mentality. For enjoying this day they buy clothes, decorate homes, cook special food and join cultural programmes. Many of them are seen to indulge into a lot of extravagance that they never had before. However, I am not here to preach to people that a penny saved is a penny earned. The question which bothers me is that should we keep the flow of capitalism in the name of promoting Bangali fashion on some special occasions only? Aren't we playing games with our own cultural self-respect? How many of us think of promoting a local product all through the year? How many of us know the significance of celebrating Pahela Baishakh itself? It seems, to have Panta for one day in 365 days is better than not to have tasted Panta ever. It is good that at least people have the taste of Panta putting on traditional dress for the sake of Baishakh celebration, wouldn't it be better if they did something for the regular Panta eaters so that they could

also have the flavor of enjoying Panta on the first day of Baishakh?

I have no intention to hamper the enjoyment and merrymaking to the least pondering over the significance but I think it is our national duty to notify our new generation that Pahela Baishakh is something to feel with your heart, something to be absorbed and infused in, something to be proud of, something which will give you courage to dream and revolt against all sorts of ugliness. Whenever I hear my students saying that they do not know what is Mongol Shovajatra, or what is the significance of 'Esho Hey Baishakh esho esho', I just feel dejected. Still I can't blame them as it is our responsibility to enlighten them about it. It is positive that we are heading for internationalism but at the same time we not only have to protect but also have to promote our own cultural, our own traditional dedication. When I join a Baishakhi Mela with someone from the new generation, I am sorry to say, although I find everything here as like as a super-shop, I miss the tenderness, the profundity, and the hospitality, the very basics on which my Bangali

identity hinges.

I would like to end my write-up with an anecdote: the day I first wanted to join Mongol Shovajatra launched by Charukola Institute on Pahela Baishakh, I did not have a white saree with a red border which I was supposed to wear. As my mother was a sincere government service holder, she could not manage time to buy a saree for me. It is tough to express in words how upset I was. Just the day before the big occasion she however managed to fetch a sareewala from whom she bought a saree for me. But unfortunately there was no blouse to wear with it. My heart was broken. I could not sleep. After a lot of trying, I don't remember when I slept but I do still remember the interruption of my sleep caused by a terrible (?) sound of an old sewing machine with which my mother was sewing my blouse in the middle of the night.

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