

Int'l Dance
Day Message

--AKRAM KHAN, UK

This very special day is dedicated to the one language that everybody in this world can speak -- the inherent language of our bodies and our souls, of our ancestors and of our children.

This day is dedicated to every god, guru and grandparent that ever taught and inspired us, to every song and impulse and moment that's ever moved us to move.

It is dedicated to the



little child that wishes it could move like its star, and to the mother who says, "You already can."

This day is dedicated to everybody of every creed, colour and culture that carries the traditions of its past into stories of the present and dreams of the future.

This day is dedicated to Dance, to its myriad dialects and its immense power to express, transform, unite and delight.

International Dance Day '09

The dancing bells that once were

In conversation with Kajol Ibrahim

SADYA AFREEN MALICK

Behind the huge wooden doors of Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts (BAFA), a doe-eyed little Kajol was keenly tapping her feet, imitating the postures of the dancers. Inside the classroom, rehearsals for a dance-drama was on in full swing. Little did Kajol notice a pair of eyes that were following her every move, almost bewitched by the little girl's ability to emulate the dance steps with such natural grace.

Kajol used to go to BAFA with her mother Badrunnessa Abdullah on weekends. While her mother trained in music, Kajol would linger near her chosen spot -- the dance room. And when the dancers started to rehearse, she would silently imitate their movements, thinking no one was watching. But that one afternoon, Kajol did have an audience of one, none other than noted dancer Rahiza Khanum Jhunu. That day, Rahiza predicted that the young girl was destined for the stage and would become one of the most successful dancers of her time. How true were her words!

Kajol's uncle Nurul Huda, president of BAFA, saw to it that she was admitted without delay and her initial 5-year training in Kathak began under Shamar Bhattacharji in 1961. Kajol immediately fell in love with the genre, mesmerised by the 'bol', 'chakra', the tinkling of the 'ghungru' ringing in her ears, the Radha-Krishna story and all the other dance routines coming to life before her very eyes. Soon she started training under eminent dancer G.A. Mannan and played the role of Shaji, the heroine in the dance-drama 'Nakshi Ka(n)thar Math', with Mannan as Rupai the hero.

Kajol's rise to fame in the dance arena was meteoric. It was not uncommon for her to be playing the lead female role opposite her instructors, many years senior to her.

"I was fortunate to have partnered with all

my gurus in the dance performances, irrespective of our considerable age differences," says a smiling Kajol.

"One day, when we were practising, renowned Tagore singer Atiqul Islam stormed into the room with a grim look on his face. A senior dancer had dropped out of the troupe and he was on the look-out for a replacement for the lead role in Tagore's dance drama 'Chitrangada.' Atique bhai was sceptical and reluctantly asked me to perform with the song, 'Amar angey angey ke bajaye bashi.' There was this particular expression in my eyes that I came up with for that piece, which seemingly impressed him. I was much relieved when he appreciated my work and I began to work with the troupe."

"To me, dance compositions came naturally, even when I was relatively young at 16. It was like a soft waterfall, the movements like the gentle ripples flowing downhill. Next came a composition from Nazrul's 'Byathar Daan,' compiled by Dr. Rafiqul Islam, titled 'Badol Barishoney.' Then there was the extremely popular composition by Dr. Enamul Haque titled 'Hajar Tarar Bina,' music composed by Altaf Mahmood."

As the country flared up in anticipation of the Liberation War, Kajol played the lead role in the patriotic dance-drama 'Rajpath Janopath'.

Kajol took Bangladeshi dance to the world stage. She toured extensively in Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan as a lead member of the dance delegation. Folk dances such as snake charmers, tea-pickers, chatka etc, were especially popular with the expatriate Bangladesh audience, she added.

Despite the enhanced facilities and the wider media support available now compared to 30 years back, Kajol feels dance in the country has not developed to its full potential. Talented dancers are not getting the required

exposure, while dancers who feature regularly in the public domain often lack the imagination and intensity required of the craft. When dance becomes mechanical, the performance loses its natural lustre, she bemoans.

However, not all is lost, she feels. A recipient of several national awards, Kajol feels optimistic about the future when she sees the rapid development of several organisations like Nrityanchal, Srishti Cultural Centre and more, all of which have taken up the arduous task of seeking talents from the grassroots level and delivering superb performances at home and abroad.

Talking about her rare experiences, she goes on, "After one of my performances at a school, the governor of the then East Pakistan, Azam Khan came up to the stage and presented me with a garland. I was totally taken aback that day!"

"In 1977, I was performing with Gawhar Jamil, an iconic dance exponent, before a very large audience in China. In the middle of the twirls from one corner of the stage to the other, I broke my toenail. I did not stop and even as I bled on the stage I continued to the end. That was how passionately I felt about dancing. As the programme came to an end the entire crowd gave us a standing ovation, and the pain seemed to have been dulled by the adulation of the audience!"

Kajol Ibrahim nee Mahmood retired from public media in 1984. What is unfortunate is that many of her award winning performances were not even properly recorded on film or archived. It would have been a learning experience for the younger generation and indeed her adoring audience to witness some of her memorable work. But failing that one can only hope that through her training, she passes on her contagious love of dancing to the next generation, so we continue to be touched by her grace for years to come.



Celebrating the universal language



Chandni

SYEDA SHAMIN MORTADA

"In thy dance, Divine Dancer, Freedom finds its image and dreams their forms. Its cadence weaves the threads of things and unwinds them for ages; Charms the atom's rebellion into beauty, Gives rhythm to the symphony of the stars; thrills life with pain, And churns up existence into surging joys and sorrows" --- Rabindranath Tagore

There is something very mystical about dance; it adds a lot of allure and beauty to the artist, captivating the hearts of the audience.

International Dance Day is being celebrated today throughout the world. Bangladesh is joining the celebration too with all the dancers and dance enthusiasts actively taking part. On the occasion, some of the renowned Bangladeshi dancers have shared their views with The Daily Star.

Sukla Sarkar: "Dance to me is a way of worshipping and I treat it like an offering to God. To me it is one of the best means to get connected to God." Talking about an age when western attitudes are becoming the norm and cultural fusion the rage amongst the young, the dancer comments, "With changing sensibilities, the parental attitude has also shifted significantly. Nowadays, parents are encouraging their children to take up dance. However, youngsters of today lack the passion and dedication that can drive them to be good artistes. They are restless and are on



Sukla Sarkar

the look out for instant fame and fortune.

"Many youngsters want to learn dance in a short period, go on stage and perform and then move on to something else. The world moves so fast now, none has any patience to learn thoroughly or delve deep into art. Unfortunately, dance is a process which has to be honed forever, and requires a lot of practice and perseverance."

Sukla adds, "We have to recognise and value our traditions. Awareness towards traditional dance is required if we want to showcase our rich and vibrant culture across the globe."

Chandni: "Dance is something I was born to do. I have been dancing since I was a child. Dance to me is an addiction, a fascination; it makes me happy when I dance. That's why I am so passionate about it."

She continues, "I participated in the Dance Festival to celebrate the International Dance Day at Shilpakala Academy. It was a two-day festival held on the 25th and 26th of this month that brought about a colourful panorama and festivity to the occasion. Various dancers from different divisions and areas of the country partook in the festival. Famous dancers and dance troupes also participated in this special event."

"The importance of this day is no less than Eid to me, as I have always celebrated this day with full zest and vigour. However I would also like to see this performing art form get more popular and accepted. The government can play a positive role here. This art form should become a part of school and college curriculum, and should be properly presented."

"Youngsters will show appreciation and interest only if they understand its history and origin. We also require high quality academies with excellent teachers to train the students. Private and public universities should provide higher education and open



Riya

Dance Departments. Every artiste requires proper support from the family, so that is another important element as well. After all it is only through dance that we can depict the cultural aspect of any civilisation."

Riya: "Dance to me is everything, it is my existence, and with it beats my heart as it involves spiritual existence." Elucidating her ideas on International Dance Day, she says "Every day is a day of dance for me. But I guess one particular day has been kept apart to create more awareness in dance and to let people know that we have a very rich tradition of dance. After all it is dance that can transform an ordinary mortal to a self-attained entity. The rhythmic footwork, body movements, use of eyes and eloquent gestures of the actors in a performance visually aid the comprehension of a play. Dance is a form through which one can put one's thought and feelings into action with the help of facial expressions and body language."

"Youngsters of today are not fully aware of this unique and beautiful art. Everybody wants to become a star nowadays and sadly they use dance as a base and tool in that regard. We need more dedication and commitment from the students."

Conversing about celebrating this occasion she says, "I was a part of the Dance Festival held at the Shilpakala Academy inaugurated on the 25th of this month. We started by putting dancing bells on the dancing feet replicas. The event saw a magnificent array of dance with a foretaste of subtle and sublime entertainment embodying philosophy, beauty and human values. The applause, the feedback and the consensus of the audience said everything about the festival."

The writer is a freelance contributor

NADIA SARWAT

Anisul Islam Hero: A member of the International Dance Council of ITI Dhaka, dance artiste Anisul Islam Hero leads the dance organisation Srishti Cultural Centre. Through the medium of dance, Hero with his troupe seeks to promote awareness on social issues such as women's rights, environment and HIV/AIDS. He has received awards for his creative work from Bangladesh Cinema Journalist's Association, Cultural Journalist's Forum and other organisations.

To extend his reach to a wider audience, he is now working on forming a dance troupe outside Dhaka. On the occasion of International Dance Day, Hero says, "Through the years, I have pondered the question when will dance be accepted as an integral art form in our country? Sometimes I blame myself as a dance artiste, sometimes the authorities, and sometimes the media too, as it fails to give adequate coverage of this art form. Even big organisations do not promote this art. Despite these limitations, I am of the opinion that there is a favourable environment for dance in our country now."



Anisul Islam Hero

Belayet Hossain Khan: Belayet stepped into the world of dance in 1973. A graduate in Bharatnatyam from Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India, he is now the principal of the cultural organisation, Jaago Art Centre.

Says the talented artiste, "To begin with, I was a student of tabla as I was fascinated by the rhythm of this instrument. At that time I hadn't heard of male dancers and naturally believed that the art form was not for men. Later, to my surprise, I came across a newspaper advertisement looking for dance artistes, both male and female. I contacted the organisation -- the reputed Jaago Art Centre led by iconic dancer Gawhar Jamil -- right away. Thus dance became a part of my life."

"At that time, most families did not encourage girls to learn dance in the belief that they would have difficulties in finding suitable husbands. Likewise the art form was considered inappropriate for boys, as the popular perception was that they would become effeminate. However, such myths no longer exist. For the last seven or eight years, we have been celebrating International Dance Day in our country. This gives younger artistes a platform to demonstrate their creativity and inspires them to greater heights."



Belayet Hossain Khan