

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Dance Drama
 Title: Savitri by Aurobindo Anusilan Society
 Organiser: High Commission of India, Dhaka and Indian Council for Cultural Relations
 Venue: National Theatre Hall, Bangladesh Shipkala Academy
 Date and time: May 14 at 7pm



Solo Performance
 Marking three decades of musical career
 Artist: Shakila Zafar
 Organiser: Anna Shujomukhi
 Venue: Main Auditorium, National Museum
 Date and time: May 16 at 6pm



Solo Art Exhibition
 Title: Urban Delight
 Artist: Kazi Salahuddin Ahmed
 Venue: Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts, H 275/F, Rd 27 (Old), Dhanmondi
 Date: May 7-20
 Time: 12-8 pm



Photography Exhibition
 Title: The Story of Tea Workers
 Photographer: Philip Gain
 Venue: Drik Gallery, H 58, Rd 15/A (new), Dhanmondi
 Date: May 10-19
 Time: 3-8pm



Fortifying the Bengali identity, being a true global citizen

Call to disseminate Gurusaday Dutt's 'Bratachari' movement



(From left) VC of Dhaka University Professor AAMS Arefin Siddique, Finance Minister AMA Muhith and Dr. Sanjida Khatun at the programme.



'Bratachari' songs and dance aim at creating a sense of global citizenship as well as national identity, irrespective of caste, religion, gender and age.



KARIM WAHEED

In 1934, Gurusaday Dutt started the 'Bratachari' movement. In his words, in "The Bratachari Synthesis" (first published in 1937), "the movement is to bring back to humanity, in all countries, the ideal and practice of the wholeness of life which, alike in the individual, the national and the international sphere has been so grievously shattered in the modern world in every country by the fragmentary outlook on, and treatment of, life in education, science, work, play and social functioning."

The aim of the movement -- in other words, Dutt's aspiration -- was to reinstate a well-rounded sense of being by upholding the inherent values of individual and regional diversities. As Dutt used to say, "Bishwa-manab hobi jodi, shashwata Bangali haw." (If you want to be an effective global citizen, be a true Bengali first.)

On the occasion of Dutt's 127th birth anniversary, on May 10, Finance Minister AMA Muhith, noted cultural activist Dr. Sanjida Khatun and VC of Dhaka University Professor AAMS Arefin Siddique went over the life and philosophies of the visionary Bengali. The programme, organised by Bratachari Samiti, Bangladesh and assisted by BRAC Bank Ltd, was held on DU campus.

A small, uniformed group of children and teenagers in red and white marched to the venue; pulsating 'dhol' generated interest among the passers-by, some stuck around out of curiosity.

The Finance Minister provided a brief account of the life and accomplishments -- highlighting the 'Bratachari' movement -- of Gurusaday Dutt.

Gurusaday Dutt, a Barrister-at-Law, politician, folklorist, writer and social reformer, was born in Birasri village of Sylhet district, in eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh) in 1882. He stood first in the FA exams (prior to Graduate studies) from Presidency College, Calcutta, in 1901 and was awarded the Scindia Gold Medal. He went on a Scholarship from the Sylhet Union to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, UK and took the Indian Civil Service (ICS) exams,

in which he stood first in the Second Part in 1904. In 1905, he returned to India and started working as an ICS officer.

The Bratachari (from 'brata,' vow) movement aims at creating a sense of global citizenship as well as national identity among people, irrespective of caste, religion, gender and age. Dutt believed in developing the mind and body, and urged people to work for national and individual progress through encouraging traditional and folk culture, especially dance and songs. The bratacharis, or followers of the movement, pledge to build their moral fibre and serve the country on the five principles of knowledge, labour, truth, unity and joy.

As the Finance Minister put it, "the Bratachari movement did not catch on in Bangladesh but, fortunately, followers of this concept are still active."

Dr. Sanjida Khatun, chairperson of Bratachari Samiti, Bangladesh, said, "Scout activities are very popular and encouraged in our schools, but Bratachari lessons, which can instil a sense of patriotism in children and inspire them to be well-rounded individuals, is never considered as an extra-curricular activity."

Performance by young bratacharis at the programme started with "Agowan Bangla." Two rows were formed by younger performers; senior bratacharis led with a crescent-like formation. The performance was more like an articulate version of a PT session; the moves were certainly inspired by indigenous dances, like the 'Jhumur.' Lyrics were basically vows: serving the motherland and thus serving the world.

An interesting aspect of this is that Dutt realised the need for nurturing the body, along with the mind, through physical labour at a time when the contemporary urban Bengali 'Babu' culture looked down upon it. Bratachari songs like "Kodal chalai," (working the shovel) emphasises that concept.

As the young performers demonstrated -- with music and dance -- the philosophies of Gurusaday Dutt to a growing audience, it became evident to one just introduced to the Bratachari movement that this concept needs to reach the grassroots.

Fahmida Nabi charms the NRBs

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Recently singer Fahmida Nabi visited the United States. The purpose of her visit was to attend a Dhallywood award giving ceremony, which featured nearly 60 Bangladeshi artistes and cultural personalities. Arranged by the Bangladeshi expatriates in the US, the programme was held on May 2 in Columbus, Ohio.

Fahmida also attended a programme in Jackson Heights, New York, responding to expat Bangladeshis' requests. Talking about the tour, the singer said, "Both programmes were hugely successful. NRBs are very cordial and remain passionate about Bangladeshi music."

The artiste informed that at the New York show, she performed several Rabindra Sangeet and songs from her recent album "Swapno Chhowa Bhalobasha." "I was surprised that they requested me to perform songs which I don't sing often. This implies they listen to a range of songs by me," she said.

So far a solo album, "Aamar Bela Jey Jaye," featuring Tagore songs by Fahmida, had been released and she wants to record more Rabindra Sangeet but not very soon. "I promised Bangladeshis in the US that I will record another album of Tagore songs but it will take time as I ardently want to delve into the genre," said Fahmida.

During her short tour, the artiste also enjoyed her new image as one of the judges on the popular talent hunt show "Close Up 1."

Fahmida returned home on May 6 and is getting busy with her upcoming projects. At present, she is working on a new album featuring songs written by the late theatre icon Selim Al Deen. The album is expected to be released on Al Deen's birth anniversary.



An evening of Hemanta Mukherjee classics

Performance by Soumitra Bandopadhyay

KAVITA CHARANJI, New Delhi

It is unlikely that a musical soiree to celebrate the 148th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore would attract strong protests from a section of the audience. However, that is just what transpired at a recent concert in Delhi by singer Soumitra Bandopadhyay, who presented an evening of Rabindra Sangeet and other popular melodies of the celebrated singer, composer, lyricist, film director and producer Hemanta Mukherjee in Hindi and Bengali. For starters some members of the audience objected to the clubbing of Hindi film songs with Bengali numbers and Rabindra Sangeet. What got their goat even more was the playful yodeling of Kishore Kumar songs by Indranil Banerjee, Soumitra's son.

The angry people had to be pacified by Bijan Mukherjee, president of Impresario India, one of the organisers of the programme. As he said, "Hemanta Mukherjee sang in both Hindi and Bengali. This concert is for all communities, not just Bengalis." Another unruffled person questioned, "We are gathered here to celebrate music, so why the objections?"

Anyway, barring the protests, the evening effectively centred on the

music of the Kolkata-based Soumitra. Among his melodious and meditative Rabindra Sangeet were "Tumi ki keballi chhobi," "Purano shei din-er kotha" and "Pagla hawar badal din-e." The Hemanta classics included a song of longing, "Tum pukar lo...," "Naa tum ham-e jaano naa hum tumhe jaane" and the famous "Jaane ye woh kaise log the jinko pyaar me pyaar mila" (the latter from the Guru Dutt classic "Pyasa").

Talking to Soumitra was an eye opener as he related many interesting anecdotes about his late guru Hemanta Mukherjee. As the singer asserted, he knew Hemanta for a span of 13 years until his death in 1989.

While Soumitra excelled in Rabindra Sangeet and the Bengali musical items he can be faulted on one score -- the heavy Bengali accent in the Hindi numbers, which detracted from the soothing ambience of the summer evening. But Soumitra had the humility to ask the audience to bear with his imperfect Hindi pronunciation.

While the young Indranil rendered some fun Kishore Kumar numbers with great aplomb, his Bengali songs lacked the depth and intensity of his father Soumitra. But this is only the beginning for Indranil, who can clearly make a mark on the music world.

The two sides of Star Trek



It takes a certain mix of optimism and frustration to contemplate the possibility of space travel. To dream of navigating the cosmos is to assume that man has the resources and the know-how to propel himself into the heavens, but also some compelling reasons to exchange his home planet for the cold vast unknown.

It was these seemingly contradictory impulses that shaped "Star Trek," the supremely influential science-fiction television series whose three-season run yielded 40 years of sequels and spinoffs including a new feature film about the origins of Kirk and Spock that opened last weekend. Yes, the series is at heart a geeky space epic, but it is also one with a political and historical context.

When it was created by Gene Roddenberry in 1966, "Star Trek" was meant to expand the notions of what a unified world could achieve -- a mission that was deeply complicated by the turmoil of the era. And the newest incarnation of "Star Trek" arrives at a moment when the world again finds itself teetering between limitless potential and peril, yearning to boldly go in all directions but potentially stuck in neutral.

The original "Star Trek" imagined the futuristic fulfilment of John F. Kennedy's inspirational oratory, in which his New Frontier became "the final frontier." The budget surpluses and budding space programme of the early 1960s gave rise, in the 23rd century, to the utopian United Federation of Planets. On the Starship Enterprise, men and women, blacks and whites, Americans, Russians and Asians -- with names like Uhura, Chekov and Sulu -- worked side by side, reflecting Roddenberry's belief that "when human beings get over the silly little problems of racism and war, then we can tackle the big problems of exploring the universe," said David Gerrold, a writer for the original "Star Trek" series.

But events during its brief original run -- the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; and the United States' ever-deepening commitment to the Vietnam War -- inevitably affected the tone of the show. By the second season, episodes like "A Private Little War" (in which Captain Kirk attempts to balance an arms race between two extraterrestrial tribes) were

commenting on America's intervention in Indochina.

Forty years later, as "Star Trek" is returning to its past so is America: the country is again gripped by anxieties about entanglements abroad, compounded by the fear that the economy could collapse at warp speed. A cautious optimism has emerged in the aftermath of the election of President Obama (whose Vulcan-like composure has invited frequent comparisons to Mr. Spock), but a surge of foreign violence, a swine flu outbreak or any number of other events could easily dampen that mood.

Roberto Orci, who wrote the new "Star Trek" movie with Alex Kurtzman, acknowledged that its retro vision of an Earth at peace was meant as a tonic for an era when people wonder if perpetual war is becoming the norm. "We're smack-dab in the middle of that very debate," he said, pointing to the growing American military presence in Afghanistan and an increasingly worrisome situation in Pakistan. "It couldn't be more stark now."

The new film has plenty of modern-day angst to address too: the efficacy of torture is touched upon (though only the film's villains employ it); an entire planet central to "Star Trek" lore is destroyed, intended by the writers as an amplified metaphor for the 9/11 attacks.

At least one person closely identified with "Star Trek" argues that for all the ways in which the franchise has been affected by current events, its optimistic vision has persisted.

"A lot of science-fiction is nihilistic and dark and dreadful about the future, and 'Star Trek' is the opposite," Leonard Nimoy, who originally played Spock, said. "We need that kind of hope, we need that kind of confidence in the future. I think that's what 'Star Trek' offers. I have to believe that -- I'm the glass-half-full kind of guy."

Source: Internet