

WHAT'S ON

Bijoy-er Natya Utsab '11
Organiser: The Daily Star and BGT
Venue: BSA
Date: January 25-31
Time: 6:30pm and 6:45pm

Folk Festival
Organiser: The Daily Star
Venue: Rabul Taha, Faculty of Fine Arts, Dhaka University
Date: January 28
Time: 4pm-9pm

Chobi Mela VI
At seven different venues
Theme: Dreams
Organiser: Dink
Date: Jan 21- Feb 3

Solo Musical Soiree
Artist: Tapan Sarkar
Venue: Nat Mondol, Dhaka University
Date: February 1
Time: 6pm

Solo Painting Exhibition
Artist: Mohammad Gaus
Venue: Dhaka Art Centre, R-7A, H-60, Dhanmondi
Date: January 28-February 6
Time: 5pm-8pm

Hindustani Classical Vocal Music
Artist: Shri Anah Chatterjee
Venue: Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre, H-35, R-24, Gulshan-1
Date: January 28
Time: 6:30 pm

Ikebana Contest and Demonstration
Organiser: JIAB and the Embassy in Japan
Venue: Lake Shore Hotel, H-46, R-4, Gulshan-2
Date: February 4, Time: 10:30am

Publication Ceremony
Organiser: DELVISTAA Foundation
Title: Austro-Burmesean
Writer: Shakir Hujjat
Venue: Brae Centre, Mohakhali
Date: Jan 30, Time: 5:30pm



(Clockwise from top-left): Scenes from "Dalim Kumar", "Shikhandi Kotha" and "Jonmoshutro".



The Daily Star-BGTF Theatre Festival

"Dalim Kumar", "Jonmoshutro" and "Shikhandi Kotha" staged

JAMIL MAHMUD
On the second day of the ongoing "Bijoyer Natya Utsab 2011" at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, three plays-- "Dalim Kumar" by Natya Kendra, "Jonmoshutro" by Theatre (Arambagh) and "Shikhandi Kotha" by Mahakal -- were staged respectively at the National Theatre Hall, Experimental Theatre Hall and Studio Theatre Hall. The Daily Star in association with Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation has organised the festival. Natya Kendra's latest play "Dalim Kumar" has been written by young playwright Shubhashish Sinha. The play has been directed by Yusuf Hassan Arko. Set against a contemporary backdrop, "Dalim Kumar" zooms in on the life of a farmer's son, who is trying to discover his identity. Hot issues like globalisation and urbanisation are highlighted in some sequences. Sinha also introduces the

familiar fabled character, Dalim Kumar, as the narrator. The cast of the play included Jhuna Chowdhury, Iqbal Babu, Yusuf Hasan Arko, Niaz Mohammad Tariq, Sangeeta Chowdhury, Habib Masud, Lucy Tripti Gomez and Sraboni Ferdous. Pintu Dev was the set designer. Yusuf Anam Khan did the lighting design. Yusuf Hassan Arko, director of the play, also did the music direction. Theatre's (Arambagh) "Jonmoshutro", also its latest production, has been written and directed by Gazi Rakayet. The play premiered on September 24 last year. "Jonmoshutro" features the missing identities of two individuals. Divided into two parts, the story proceeds with depictions of two different eras. The first incident is set against the backdrop of undivided Bengal, while the second occurs in recent times. Jahangir Bhuiyan, Khaled Anand, Oltur Rahman, Eusha Antara and Tahmina

Aktar play the lead roles. Thandu Raihan's light design deserves special mention. Apart from direction, Rakayet also did the stage design. "Mahakal's "Shikhandi Kotha" is one of its most successful plays to date. The play saw its 100th staging last year. Written by Anon Zaman and directed by Rashid Harun, the play sheds light on the inter-sex community. The production narrates the story of an inter-sex individual, who is born into a family as Ratan. After identifying Ratan's gender, the family refuses to accept him. Ratan joins others like him and takes the name Ratna. The story shows Ratna and other inter-sex individual's woes as well as rare blissful moments. Anon Zaman, Mir Zahid Hasan, Shuddho Hasan and Rajonno Taslim play the central characters. Tanvir Hasan and Shafiqul Islam designed the set, while Rafiqul Haque Himel did the light designing.

TODAY AT THE FESTIVAL

On the fourth day (January 28) of The Daily Star-BGTF Theatre Festival, the following plays will be staged at 6:30pm at the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy:

"Kathal Bagan"
Venue: National Theatre Hall
Troupe: Nagarik Natyasampraday
An adaptation of the Chekhov-play "The Cherry Orchard"
Director: Aly Zaker

Synopsis: The play is a depiction of a Bengali aristocratic family during a transition.

"Shonai Madhob"
Venue: Experimental Theatre Hall
Troupe: Loko Natyadal (Banani)
Based on a popular story from "Mymensingh Geetika"
Director: Eugene Gomez

Synopsis: The story of the play narrates in the traditional form 'padabali jatra'.

"Ebgong Aswamedh Jaggio"
Venue: Studio Theatre Hall
Troupe: Natyadhara
Playwright: Alok Basu
Director: Debashish Ghosh

Synopsis: The story of the play is based on the epic Ramayana.

Basilio Opens with a Brilliant Exhibition

TAKIR HOSSAIN
Basilio is a newly opened art gallery at New DOHS in Dhaka. Maksudul Ahsan, a recognised painter, is the CEO of the gallery. The gallery's aim is to promote and give exposure to the artwork of promising and noted painters of Bangladesh in the country and abroad. On the occasion of its opening, the gallery has organised a group art exhibition featuring the works of Quayyum Chowdhury, Kazi Abdul Baset, Samarjit Roy Chowdhury, Rafiqun Nabi, Monirul Islam, Hamiduzzaman Khan, Mahmudul Haque, Abul Barq Alvi, Shahid Kabir, Biren Shome, Abdus Shakoor Shah, Mahbubul Amin, Alakesh Ghosh and Chandra Shekhar Dey.

Late Kazi Abdul Baset and Mahbubul Amin's works lend a significant edge to the exhibition. Baset stepped into the art world in the 1950s. His use of smooth lines and vibrant colours communicate a lyrical rural Bengali life to art enthusiasts. Baset was able to create his own impressions in both realistic and abstract moods. In his realistic works, he has mingled many elements of rural Bengal. "Gypsy Girl", "Woman with Fan", "Fisherman" are some of his widely popular creations. At the exhibition, his "Fish Sellers" (Lithograph) features geometrical figures of women carrying fish on their heads, set against a beige backdrop.



had a great passion for folk art. His recurring motifs are birds, kites, leaves, wild flowers, boats and fish. Scribbles and thick lines crisscross his painting to which female forms in a semi-realistic mode turn their gaze. The lines are not polished. The uneven lines create an individual language, highlighting a rural essence. His works present a combination of traditional and modern geometric and abstract forms. At the exhibition, Monirul Islam's etching and aquatint carry vague forms, suggestive lines and colours, done in precise geometrical shapes. The essential lines, drawn with a delicate and lyrical touch, provide a touch of romanticism to the piece. In his compositions, Monir uses doodles, sharp lines and tiny motifs. Artist Shahid Kabir attained fame for his series on Lalon. Eventually he concentrated on subjects from everyday life, like street vendors, vagabonds, brickfields, rivers, working women, water vessels, teapots and fruits. Kabir is a true romantic who observes beauty in the little things in life. At the exhibition, his painting depicts a woman in a jowl mood and the colours deliver an imposing view. Abul Barq Alvi gives a sample of pure painting with rectangles in yellow, red, green and sepia that draw attention to the artist's nostalgic recollection of the past. The artwork has beige, brown and white forms set off by delicate and modest lines. Artist Abdus Shakoor Shah is widely recognised for his portrayal of folk motifs and ancient ballads. The artist has pasted pieces of a multicoloured saree and gamchha on his canvas that is on display at the exhibition. These pieces give his works a decorative quality. The canvas appears more vibrant and lively with its slightly cracked surface. The mixed media work also shows a woman whose face is surrounded by varied folk motifs. Chandra Shekhar Dey prefers to go into details and his lines are provocative. At the exhibition, scribbles, lines, a hazy female figure and unfamiliar objects are noticeable in his works. The female form bears a poignant demeanor. The exhibition ends today.

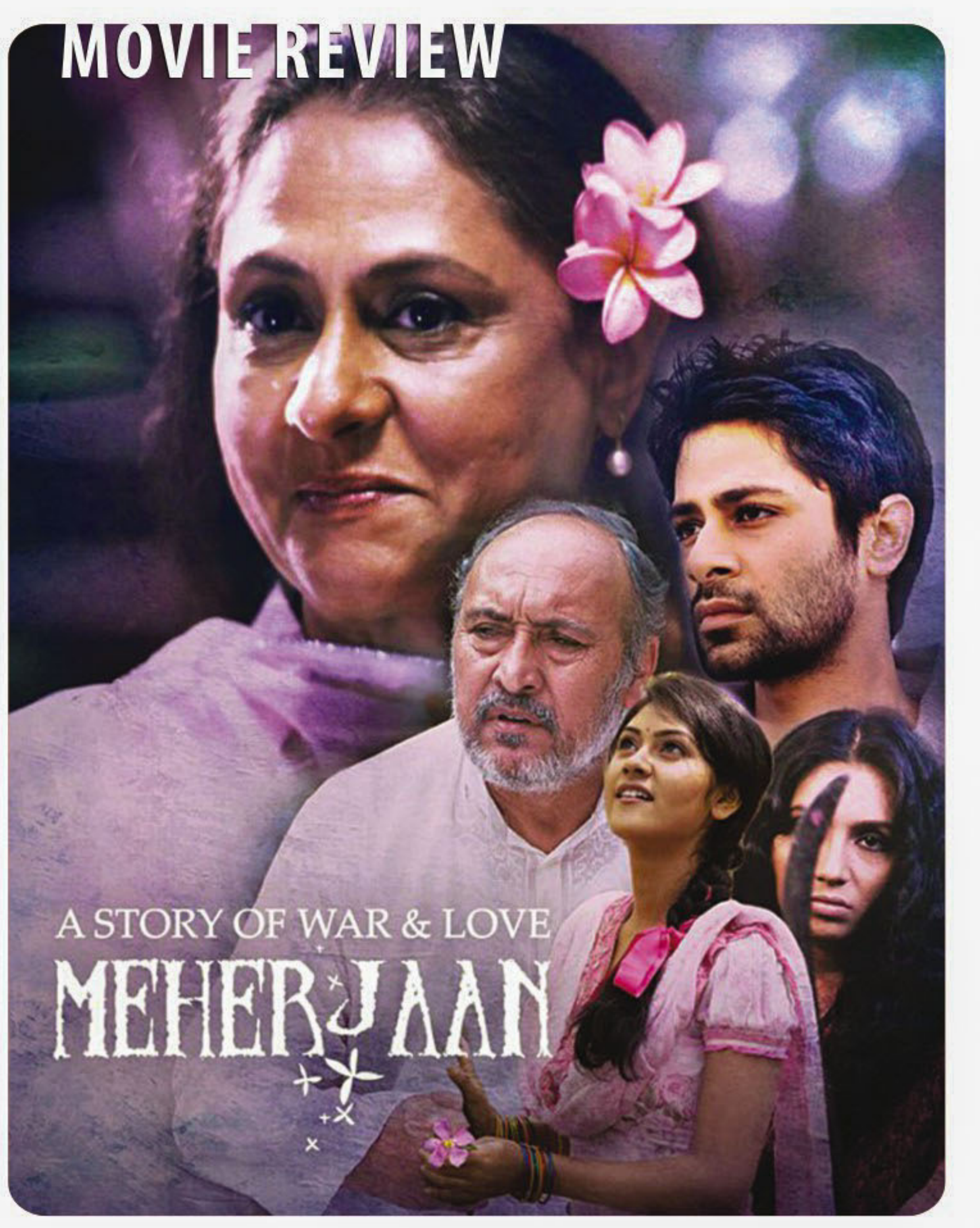
Mahbubul Amin did not enjoy widespread fame as an artist, but he was a good teacher. He had a great fondness for realism. As a teacher of Faculty of Fine Arts, he taught students new ways of expressing ideas and lay emphasis on drawing. He always tried to maintain a low profile, and led a very simple life. At the exhibition, his painting depicts a cock fight, set against an uneven background. Quayyum Chowdhury is a noted illustrator. Designs, and largely illustration, often take away from the aesthetics of his paintings. At the exhibition, one of his paintings depicts trees, flowers and other elements of landscapes in compositional structure in shades of chocolate brown, black and white. Samarjit Roy Chowdhury has always



Clockwise (from top): Artworks by Kazi Abdul Baset, Mahbubul Amin, Monirul Islam and Rafiqun Nabi.

Meherjaan

A Lot of Naive Love, Lot Less War



KARIM WAHEED
I went to Star Cineplex to watch "Meherjaan" with a lot of expectations. The filmmaker Rubaiyat Hossain, a young academic who had studied the cases of Birangonas (war heroines of 1971) for her thesis, had said the film provides a female perspective of the Liberation War. The tagline of the movie is: "A story of war and love." "The purpose of 'Meherjaan' is to break free of the typical male narrative and open up a conversation to explore other perspectives on the Liberation War," Rubaiyat said in an interview published earlier in The Daily Star. If you've been following reactions to the film and reviews in newspapers and online, you're well aware that "Meherjaan" has generated a firestorm of debate. While most are shocked and appalled by the film (rather the core idea of it), some have just chosen to see it as a work of fiction. But before getting to the controversial part, let's get the basics out of the way: The film follows Meher, who falls for a soldier from the enemy side during the Liberation War. When her love is discovered, she is shamed and silenced by her family and society. Thirty-eight years after the war, she is approached by Sarah -- a "war child", Meher's cousin Neela's daughter, who was given away for adoption. As Sarah tries to understand her origins, Meher recalls a past riddled with agony and guilt. Perhaps the biggest objection to the film that has surfaced is the central story: a love affair between a

young Bengali woman and a Pakistani soldier while the Liberation War is full-on. Many have questioned the "audacity" of the filmmaker, some sense a "hidden agenda", when "The Reader" was released (in 2008), there was no controversy. It told the story of a teenager having an affair with an older woman who worked as a guard at a Nazi concentration camp during the 2nd World War. Neither did "Monster's Ball" (2001) -- a film about an African-American woman's relationship with a racist prison warden who had executed her husband -- raise an eyebrow. I'm not mentioning these films to draw a comparison; not at all -- just analogies. The core concept is a seemingly inappropriate, politically incorrect relationship. Rubaiyat has even gone to the extent of making the character of the Pakistani soldier halaal: he is a renegade, who refuses to open fire on Bengali civilians. To his authorities there is no difference between him and a Bengali gaddar. Moreover, he saves Meher from an approaching troop of enemy soldiers and becomes her knight in shining armour in a true commercial movie style. This film is not a documentary; neither does it claim to be a portrait of the Liberation War, it is an out and out work of fiction with references to a historic event; allegations of trying to distort history are thus undeserved. The portrayal of Neela, Meher's cousin who had been raped by Pakistani soldiers, has been criticised as well. Is there a certain code of conduct raped/abused women should abide by? Is it wrong of Neela

to be defiant and unashamed? The storyline seemed intriguing on paper; a counter-cultural narrative if you will. But did it translate well to screen? My biggest issue with the film is its lack of cohesion. Certain scenes in a sequence seem randomly placed and a few, somewhat unnecessary. I wasn't necessarily looking for a depiction of direct combat from this film. To me the "war" part of the tagline was represented by Neela and her reality. Meher embodied "love" or a "dream". And what a dream Rubaiyat had woven through the lens of Samiran Datta! Mustard fields have never been happier yellow; water lilies stunning enough to make Monet jealous. Who needs the Swiss Alps? But even a liberal viewer like me cringed at the idea of a young woman frolicking with her lover (regardless of which side he belongs to) in broad daylight during a war. I didn't understand the relevance of the deranged aunt (played by the director) either. Was the sole purpose of the role just to instill the 'love with a soldier' fantasy in young Meher? None of the characters, except for Neela (ably played by Reetu Sattar), is bold enough to engage the audience throughout the movie. There's a serious case of miscasting as well. Inclusion of amateur actors in a cast that boasts thespians like Victor Banerjee, Jaya Bachchan and Humayun Faridiee is like a generous serving of biryani that has undercooked rice and beautifully done meat. Close shots of Jaya Bachchan's (as the middle-aged Meher) face, as she opens a chest to get her journal

written during the war, speaks volumes without words. The high-spirited showdown between Nanajaan (Victor Banerjee) -- Meher's grandfather and the unofficial feudal lord of the village who doesn't want any bloodshed -- and the local collaborator of the Pakistani forces (Humayun Faridiee) is remarkable. Pakistani actor Omar Rahim as Wasim Khan, the runaway soldier who romances Meher, looked the part but giving him dialogues was perhaps an unwise decision. Music (directed by Neil Mukherjee) is undoubtedly the film's strong suit. Particularly, the use of "Hum Ke Thehre Ajnabi" written by Faiz Ahmed Faiz and immaculately rendered by Nayyara Noor is fitting. In defiance of official silence, Faiz -- considered the most prolific of modern Urdu poets -- protested the army action against civilians in then East Pakistan and the arrest of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Faiz wrote the poem, titled "Dhaka Say Wapsi Par" (On Return from Dhaka) in 1974 which was later translated into a ghazal. But to those unfamiliar with this reference, this would just be an Urdu song -- potentially drawing more criticism. To sum it up, "Meherjaan" doesn't live up to its tagline. It's mostly about naive love depicted in a way that didn't speak to me, and very little war. But the film has its moments, even if they are few and far between. It is an academic's well-intentioned but (at times) misguided effort in storytelling. After all's said and done, it's the audience who'll decide whether this film is a success or failure.

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Madhusudan Dutt's 187th Birthday Observed



(From left): Professor Shantanu Kaisar, Professor Golam Murshid, Shamsuzzaman Khan and Mohammad Abdul Hai at the discussion.

welcome speech. Shamsuzzaman Khan, director general of Bangla Academy presided over the programme. Golam Murshid said, "Michael Madhusudan Dutt was an exceptionally gifted student. His merit, and unconventional, eventual life have added to his charismatic character. His works delved deep into individualism, romanticism and secularism." Shantanu Kaisar said, "Madhusudan's epic poem, 'Meghnad-Badh Kabya' is considered his all-time masterpiece till today. The epic was written in nine cantos which is unique in the history of Bengali poetry." "With his extraordinary talent, Dutt brought about revolutionary changes in Bengali literature. He would always be highly regarded in the history of Bengali literature as the creator of Amitrakshar Chhanda. He collected themes for his literary works from the Sanskrit Puranas and ancient Hindu epics." Shamsuzzaman Khan said, "Dutt is considered a leading figure of the Bengali Renaissance of the mid-nineteenth century. His most significant contributions are to poetry." After the discussion, Manipuri Theatre staged Dutt's "Kohe Birangona".

Bangla Academy organised a discussion and cultural programme recently on the occasion of 187th birth anniversary of Michael Madhusudan Dutt at the Seminar Hall of the academy.

Professor Golam Murshid read out a paper on Madhusudan's literary works. Noted literary critic Professor Shantanu Kaisar spoke on "Meghnad-Badh Kabya" and its literary elements. Mohammad Abdul Hai, director of Language, Literature, Culture and Newspaper Department of the academy, delivered the

Table with TV channels and programmes: ATN BANGLA, CHANNEL i, ntv, etc.

Table with RADIO stations: abc radio FM 89.2, 88.00, 99.00, etc.

Advertisement for Juboraj On CHANNEL i at 10:30am, featuring a woman's face.

Table with Rtv programmes: 12:05 Basudha Protidin-er Gaan, 02:30 Drama, etc.

Table with DRAAMA SERIAL: ATN BANGLA, ntv, etc.

Table with NEWS BULLETIN: BTV, BANGLAVISION, etc.

Table with TALK SHOW: ATN BANGLA, ntv, etc.