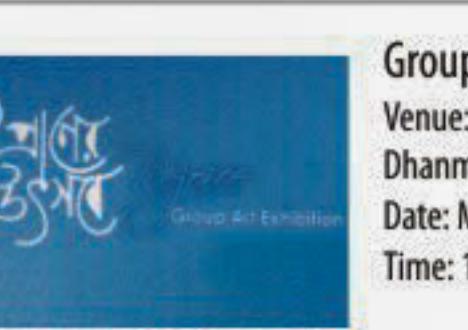


WHAT'S ON



Group Art Exhibition
Venue: Dhaka Art Centre,
Dharmundi
Date: May 12-20
Time: 12pm-8pm



Film Festival
Organiser: Zahir Raihan Film
Society
Venue: Alliance Francaise, 26,
Mirpur Rd
Date: May 12-21



Solo Exhibition
Sculptor: Samiran Dutt
Venue: Shilpangan Gallery,
Dharmundi
Date: May 13-22
Time: 10pm-8pm



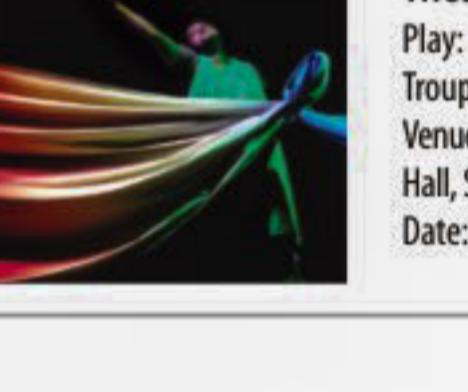
Solo Musical Soiree
Artist: Dr. Nasirul Kamal
Venue: IGCC, H-35, Rd-24,
Gulshan-1
Date: May 20
Time: 6:30pm



Dhaka Int'l Theatre Fest
Organiser: IITI Bangladesh
Centre
Venue: Bangladesh
Shilpkala Academy
Date: May 21-30



Tagore Birth Anniversary
Celebration
Organiser: Bengal Foundation
Venue: Bengal Shilpalya, H
275/F, Rd 27 (old), Dharmundi
Date: May 19-21



Theatre
Play: Lal Jamin
Troupe: Shunnon
Venue: Experimental Theatre
Hall, Shilpkala Academy
Date: May 20



Group Art Exhibition
Organiser: FFA and BGA
Venue: Bengal Galery,
Dharmundi
Date: April 16-21
Time: 12pm-8pm

International Museum Day 2011 Observed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Marking International Museum Day 2011, Bangladesh National Museum (BNM), Ministry of Cultural Affairs arranged a day-long programme titled "Museum and Memory: Objects tell your story" at the main auditorium of BNM on May 18.

On the occasion, a rally was brought out in the morning. The Nalini Kanta Bhattachari memorial speech followed a poet Sufia Kamal auditorium of the museum. Professor Emeritus ABD Hosseini, of Rajshahi University, delivered the speech.

A discussion and cultural programme were held at the main auditorium of the museum in the evening. Information and Cultural Affairs Minister Abdul Kalam Azad was the chief guest at the event. Kazi Keramat Ali, chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee of the Cultural Ministry, was a special guest. Suraiya Begum, MDC, secretary in-charge, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, was a guest of honour at the programme. President of Restoration Board of BNM, M. Azizur



Secular Festivals and Collective Art: Tagore, Shantiniketan and Ramna Batomul

SHUMON SENGUPTA

Progressive societies are invariably built on a fine combination of essential freedoms, intellectual knowledge and shared artistic experience. Individual and collective arts are therefore integral parts of human life and nature. It is well known that Erich Fromm, the highly influential social psychologist of the 20th century, theorised about the need for reviving collective art and ritual on a secular and non-sectarian basis.

Approximately 70 years before Erich Fromm articulated his theory, Rabindranath Tagore was already putting this into practice in Shantiniketan, exploring the possibility of creating secular festivals and celebration of collective art in an otherwise socially and culturally fractured society.

Common Hindu festivals have often been collective endeavours in which a large number of people came together spontaneously in celebrations of piety and joy. However, Tagore was quick and astute enough to observe that not only did these collective festivals exclude people from other religions but also these effectively kept at bay other Hindus who had been systematically kept at the "bottom" of the caste hierarchy. This systematic exclusion greatly offended Tagore's innate humanism. He therefore conceived festivals that would transcend narrow denominational boundaries of cast, creed and class, and hence introduced the celebration of seasons in Shantiniketan.

Tagore and Shantiniketan

Tagore conceived the *utshab* (festival) as a celebration of diversity that excluded none. For him it was to be an event or cluster of events in which individuals and groups from all sections of the society would come together. *Utsab* therefore represented a holistic celebration of the whole of human society, which presented the opportunity for shared aesthetic experience and creativity. According to Tagore scholar Kathleen M. O'Connell, while acknowledging the need for special types of individual and group space, Tagore committed himself to the creation of an overall public space, where the extended human family could gather and be made welcome.

About Religion, Tagore rightly observed that its doors were open to a restricted group of people who subscribed to it. Nature, on the other hand, cradled all - nature was above all considerations of religion, cult, caste or class. As for festivals on nature, if there was a "presiding deity", that deity was anyone and everyone who welcomed others and participated under the canopy of the trees, the blue expanse of the sky, in the soft sunlight and in an air redolent with fragrance of blossoms.

Tagore therefore organised festivals in Shantiniketan heralding different seasons. The celebration of the seasons through songs, dance and fares became a regular event in the Shantiniketan calendar. The *Borsha-mongol* would be observed to celebrate the advent of the rains, *Sharad Utsab* to celebrate Autumn, *Poush Mela* to celebrate winter, *Bashonto Utsab* to celebrate



Tagore approaching the festival grounds in Amrakunja, Shantiniketan (Pahela Boishakh in 1940).



Seasonal celebration in Shantiniketan.



'Borsho Boron' in Dhaka.

The *Borsho Boron* programme then kicks off a cluster of diverse events, including the spectacular pageantry (*Mangal Shobhajatra*) from the adjoining *Charukala* (Faculty of Fine Arts), organised by the past and current students of the institution. Simultaneously, there are scores of cultural shows arranged by other organisations, keeping the university area alive with heavy rush of people. The other events in the fringes of *Borsho Boron* includes Bengali food festivals, fairs selling traditional handicrafts, face painting, folk music, street theatre etc. Integral parts of the festival are traditional sweets and rice cakes, *Panta-llish-Bhotta* (soaked rice, fried Hilsa fish and spicy mashed vegetables) and other delicacies. Millions of people from all walks of life attend the festival, dressed in red and white, in a spontaneous expression of joy and fellow feeling.

While the biggest and the most spectacular celebration takes place at the Ramna Park in central Dhaka, simultaneously thousands of similar smaller celebrations take place throughout the country. The *Borsho Boron* Festival is telecast live from Ramna Park on Television. In places across the country, communities from minority groups, such as those in the Chittagong Hill Tracts celebrate the day in their own unique and spectacular ways. Apart from bringing forth the opulent cultural heritage of the country, the *Borsho Boron* festival also clearly celebrates the rich ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of Bangladesh.

Chhayanat has taken great pains and has shown formidable courage in ensuring that it remains completely secular, non-sectarian and apolitical. They have therefore consistently and very successfully resisted the attempts, overt and covert, by politicians to use the powerful *Borsho Boron* platform to convey political messages. Moreover, attempts of fundamentalist groups to subvert the event, including once by bombing the venue (killing many people) have come to a naught. Citizens of Dhaka started attending the event with even greater determination and enthusiasm since the bombing, in a clear message reaffirming their faith and support to the essential values behind the festival.

Inter-religious, inter-community and non-sectarian communion was something that deeply occupied Tagore throughout his lifetime, just as much as the lack of it continues to pose immense problems in our largely troubled world today. It is in this light that the *Borsho Boron Utshab* of Bangladesh attains special value and universal importance. Stemming fundamentally from an artistic impulse, what started off as a modest experiment of promoting secular festivals of the seasons and collective art by Tagore in

1961, has gained massive momentum in Bangladesh -- the country of his ancestry. It is here that we see the complete fruition of his dream in a classic and splendid case of life imitating art. Had Tagore been alive today, he would have been proud.

Shumon Sengupta is Country Director, Save the Children UK in Bangladesh. He is an Indian aesthete, with a deep interest in Bangladesh and Bengal culture.

of Rabindra Sangeet and Bengali performing art forms).

Sawar Ali, one of the founding members of Chhayanat, has recounted the history of the institution very lucidly for us. The institution was founded in 1961, the year that marked the birth centennial of Tagore. The organisation sought to counter the fundamentalist ideologies that were forcefully imposed upon the Bengalis during Pakistani rule. It was the late Waheedul Haque and Dr. Sanjida Khatun who conceived and orchestrated Chhayanat's first *Borsho Boron* programme in 1961.

Artists and cultural activists had to celebrate the 100th birth anniversary of Tagore in 1961, by organising programmes in secret since it could not be done publicly. This experience brought many activists together and led to the founding of Chhayanat.

Borsho Boron, literally meaning, "ushering in the New Year", is a wonderful festival organised by Chhayanat (an institution of national importance and a centre for research, teaching and promotion

of Rabindra Sangeet and Bengali performing art forms). Chhayanat generally starts at 6:15 in the morning and lasts for approximately two hours. The event now principally includes songs of the leading five Bengali poets (Tagore, Nazrul, Aliprasad, D.L. Roy and Rajmanik), folk melodies and other traditional music, as well as recitation. Teachers, alumni and students of Chhayanat present solo, duet and group performances at the event and it also includes presentation of classical South Asian instrumental music. With large number of artists singing in once voice, the choruses of Chhayanat are of the highest possible quality.

The programme ends with a three-minute (never a minute more) message by Dr. Sanjida Khatun who, apart from wishing the spectators, makes it a point to remind them, in her own inimitable and gentle way, of the message of Tagore: the importance of being one with nature and of the need to cultivate art and culture, not only for human and social development but also for promoting harmony, cooperation and constructive nation-building.

Rupamadhuji, Hip Hurrey (Live)

Z Studio

11:30 Meet the Fockers

12:00 Walking Tall: The Payback

12:30 Duplex

12:45 Shanghai Knights

01:00 Easy Virtue

01:30 Mission Impossible II

11:45 H2O

12:00 Paradox

12:30 Rush Hour

01:00 Trapped

01:30 Anaconda 3: Offspring

02:00 The Ugly Truth

02:30 Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

03:00 H

03:30 A Few Good Men

04:00 Bad Boys

04:30 Knowing

05:00 Possessive

05:30 Gamer

06:00 Once Upon a Crime

06:30 Star World

11:25 Community

12:00 Las Vegas

01:30 Two And A Half Men

02:00 Dexter

02:30 How I Met Your Mother

03:00 H

03:30 Star Movies

04:00 Star World

04:30 Star World

05:00 Star World

05:30 Star World

06:00 Star World

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