

Fakir Lalon Shai ...123 years on

Five-day Lalon Mela underway



Bauls and followers of Lalon's ideologies are keeping his music and philosophy alive.

The news of Fakir Lalon Shai's death was first published in the newspaper Grambartha Prakashika, run by Kungal Harinath. The newspaper noted that Lalon died on October 14, 1890 at the age of 116. Based on that article, researchers point that Lalon was born in 1774. According to Bangla Calendar, the day was Pahela Kartik.

Like many other traditional festivals and anniversaries, Lalon's death anniversary has also been observed according to Bangla calendar, on Pahela Kartik. There are controversies about his birthplace but it is certain that he was buried at Chheuria, where the present-day Lalon Mela is held.

Born just 17 years after the Battle of Palashi, Lalon lived over a century under British rule. Though it is not apparent how the British Raj impacted Lalon's life and works, Lalon had a definite vision of major social reform. Apart from his mystic attributes, one of his main goals was to change a society riddled with religious bigotry.

Throughout his life, Lalon sang of a society where all religions and beliefs are in harmony.

Though Lalon is primarily identified as a mystic, philosopher, songwriter and composer, it wouldn't be an overstatement to term him a social reformer.

During Lalon's lifetime, undivided Bengal

went through several historic events like the 'Chirasthayi Bandobasto,' Titumir's Rebellion, and the Indigo Revolt. Some feel that Lalon, who didn't receive formal education, was not aware of those social changes. But there is a question mark on this theory. It would definitely make more sense for contemporary Lalon researchers to pursue this subject rather than attempt to trace his religious background.

One of Lalon's contemporary social reformers was Kungal Harinath (1833-1896). Researchers note that Lalon was a close friend of Harinath. Lalon also regularly visited the zamindar family of Shilaidah. It is said that zamindar Jyotirindranath Tagore (elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore) sketched Lalon's portrait, which remains the only authentic document of Lalon's visage.

Lalon's philosophical expression, based on oral and textual traditions, was expressed in songs and musical compositions. The lyrics of his songs were explicitly meant to engage in the philosophical discourses of Bengal. He critically re-appropriated the various philosophical positions emanating from the legacies of Hindu, Jain, Buddhist and Islamic traditions, developing them into a coherent school of thought.

Lalon's songs have attracted widespread attention for their mystical approach to

humanism as well as their melodious tunes. But even after 120 years of his death, we are yet to preserve all of his songs appropriately, though the government, corporate, NGOs and many individual researchers have been taking initiatives since the 1960s.

A common problem that arises during the documentation of any orally transmitted art form from the primary source is that nobody can claim his or her work to be absolutely authentic, since words change when it is transmitted from one singer to another. Lalon Geeti is no exception to the trend. According to his followers, Fakir Maniruddin Shah, a direct disciple of Lalon, used to note down the verses.

According to the experts and true bearers of Lalon's spirit, Lalon composed about 2,000 verses. However, many rural Bauls claim that Lalon composed over 10,000 songs. The problem is that years after Lalon's death, many pseudo-Bauls have labelled songs composed by other Baul gurus as Lalon's.

There are different aspects of Lalon's personality and philosophy, but it would be easier to know him through his songs. If we do so it would be a true tribute to the great mystic Baul.

Compiled by Staff Correspondent

AMANUR AMAN, Kushtia

The five-day programme chalked out to observe the 123rd death anniversary of Baul Lalon Shai was inaugurated on Thursday at his akhra at Cheuria, Kushtia.

Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu inaugurated the programme as chief guest, with Additional Deputy Commissioner (DC), Kushtia Mofazzal Hayat in the chair.

In his address, the information minister emphasised on Lalon's secular thoughts. "We should imbibe lessons from Lalon on religious harmony. Lalon did not follow rituals of any particular religion but he embraced the good things of all religions," he said.

This time, the anniversary programme was observed a day late, due to Eid-ul-Azha festival. Bauls from different areas have assembled at the akhra and are observing the programme as per schedule.

Rezanur Rahman Khan Choudhury Mukul, general secretary of the Lalon Academy told that the programme has been chalked out after discussing with Baul exponents and the Bauls.

Ministry of Cultural Affairs is assisting the programme and Kushtia district administration is supervising the event.

The programme includes a 'Lalon Mela', discussion and rendition of songs by artists of Lalon Academy and bauls from



across the country. A huge turnout of observers has been noticed in the akhra owing to the Eid vacations. Few foreign observers were also seen visiting the place.

Rebecca Almond -- a US citizen who is a graduate of Arts and a devotee of spiritualism visiting the fair -- told this correspondent that she is here to listen to Lalon song in their original tune and arrangement.

Bauls are being offered meals this will continue till October 20. Free medical treatment for the Bauls has also been arranged.

Banglalink is the sponsor of the programme.

Farid Ahmed's "Hartalnama" screened at Film Southasia 2013

"Hartals are no longer a form of protest"

KAIVITA, New Delhi

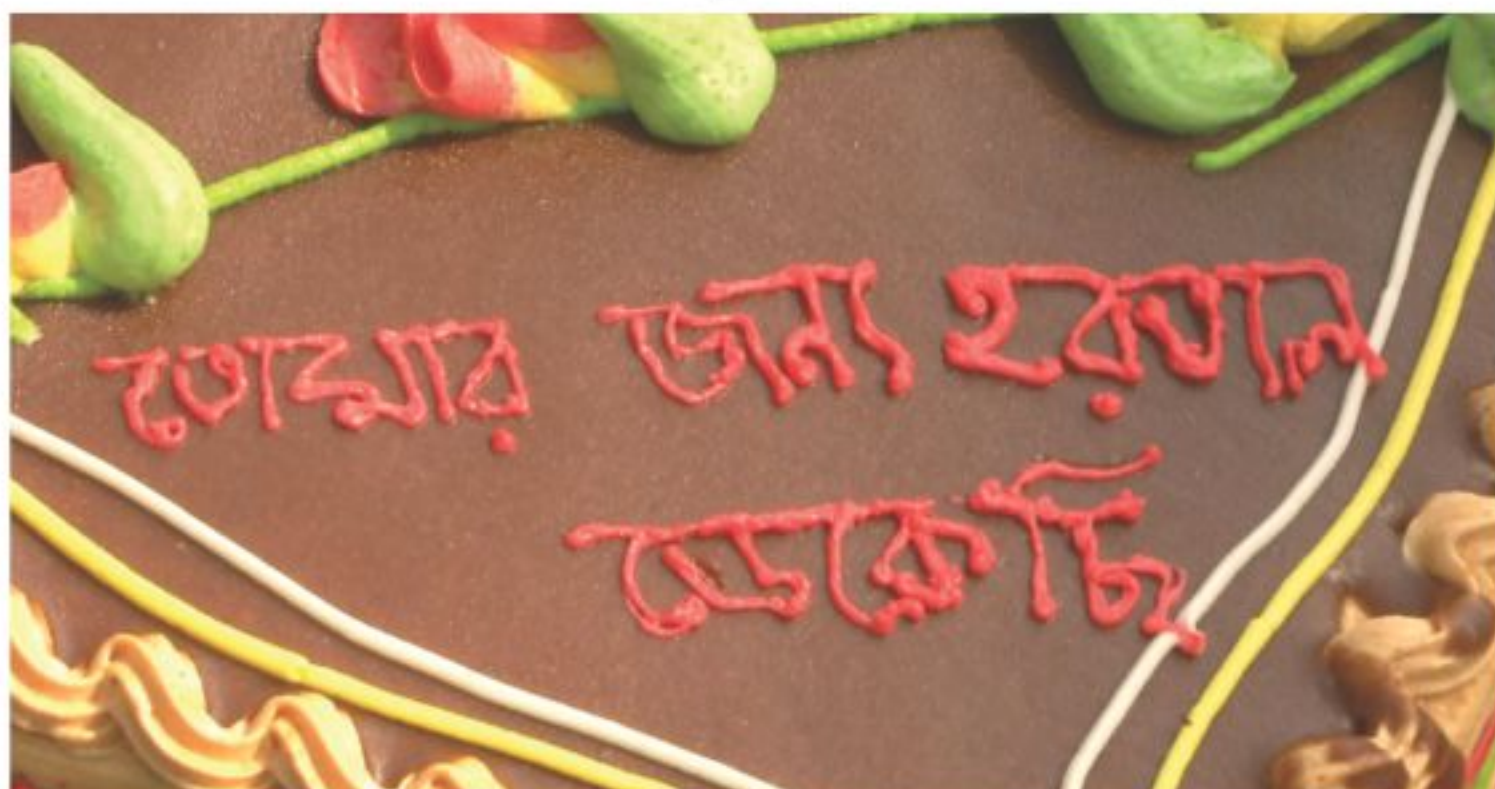
Farid Ahmed's scathing documentary "Hartalnama" (The Strike) was screened at the Film Southasia 2013 (October 3-6) in Kathmandu, Nepal. The Daily Star spoke to Ahmed about the film and its making:

How did you get the idea for "Hartalnama"? What is the aim of the film?

Strike, better known as hartal, is observed, celebrated and called off. The film is about how the people of Bangladesh perceive the hartal or strike. Hartal is no longer a people's affair; it has been usurped by political parties, where very few genuine activists come to observe a strike.

I conceived "The Strike" as a political satire where people celebrate hartal day as a holiday. Sometimes they don't know even know why a hartal is called on or off.

The film is Bangladesh-centric. What is its universal



appeal?

This film is about political violence in Bangladesh. Hartal is a popular form of political activism all over the world, especially in South Asian countries. It is called in the name of political rights. The hartal has a glorious history in the Indian subcontinent. However, it is no longer a form of protest. Rather it has turned into mass violation day by day; picketing, destruction of public property is the common scenario of the hartal in South

Asia. The aim of the film is to portray how violation of human rights occurs in the name of political rights and how hartal, a political tool of protest becomes isolated from people.

The Festival in Nepal - what does it mean to you as a filmmaker?

The South Asian film festival is a renowned platform for documentary films of South Asian countries.

What are you working on

presently? Any future projects?

I have just made another film on the Rana Plaza disaster, the largest garment sector disaster ever in the world where 1,132 people died. Two thousand and two hundred and ninety one are missing. My focus was on the missing garment workers whose relatives still gather in front of the collapsed building in search of missing dead bodies.

Presently I have received a government grant to make a short film on the pre-Liberation war of Bangladesh. Last year, the government introduced a grant for young filmmakers and offered a grant for 5 short films. I hope, I can complete this film by next month.

I have been gearing up for new projects on the Liberation War. I have a special interest in the history of Bangladesh. My next project is on the story of formation of an exile government of Bangladesh.



IT'S TRUE!

Indian actress-supermodel Deepika Padukone's father Prakash was a former badminton player of international repute, while her sister Anisha is a golfer.

The focus of her early life was badminton, which she played competitively from a young age. Padukone continued to pursue a career in badminton throughout her school years, and played the sport in national level championships. She also played baseball in a few state level tournaments. In tenth grade, she changed focus and decided to become a fashion model, with approval of his father. As her success escalated in the field, she began receiving acting offers, and enrolled in Anupam Kher's acting academy.

Of baby elephants and mother crocodiles

"Wildlife Photographer of the Year" announced



Elephants have a mysterious and "tangible energy" according to South African photographer Greg Du Toit.

Now after a 10 year quest, his portrayal of this "energy" has been captured in an award-winning photo. Titled "Essence of Elephants",

the work has earned him the overall title in this year's Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition. Preparation and passion, he says, were the key to achieving the winning shot, taken from just over one metre away. "There was one

particular day when a baby elephant raced past right in front of my camera and I was ready. I had to be prepared for that moment," said Du Toit.

He took the picture at a waterhole in Botswana's Northern Tuli Game Reserve from a hide (a sunken freight container) that provided a ground-level view. He had been going to the area five or six times a year for 10 years. "I chose elephants because I feel a very special energy and connection when I'm around them," he told BBC News.

"But although you feel that energy it's very difficult to translate that into a camera because an elephant is such a big animal and they're not very charismatic, whereas a predator is far more charismatic."

To achieve the cool blue hue, he attached a polarising filter and adjusted the white balance.

The Wildlife Photographer of the Year (WPY) "means a lot to me for

various reasons," said Du Toit, especially because photos were submitted anonymously, putting professionals and amateurs on an equal footing.

Chair of the judging panel Jim Brandenburg said: "Greg's image immediately catapults us to African plains. This image stood out for both its technical excellence and the unique moment it captures - it is truly a once in a lifetime shot."

Meanwhile, this year's Young Wildlife Photographer of the year is 14-year-old Udayan Rao Pawar from India. His photo was of a fresh water crocodile with hatchlings on its head "kind of resembling a crown", Pawar explained. He crept up on the nestling colony of gharials on the banks of the Chambal River.

"I could hear them making little grunting sounds. Very soon a large female surfaced near the shore, checking on her charges. Some of the hatchlings swam to her and climbed onto her head. Perhaps it made

them feel safe," he said.

Despite conservation efforts, the gharial fresh water crocodile is on the verge of extinction with an estimated 200 mating pairs remaining.

"The Chambal River is the gharial's last stronghold but is threatened by illegal sand-mining and fishing," added Udayan.

Wildlife Photographer and Judge Tui De Roy said the composition and timing of the photograph was perfect.

WPY is one of the most prestigious competitions in world photography. Organised by London's Natural History Museum and BBC Wildlife Magazine, it is now in its 49th year. Images are selected for their creativity, artistry and technical complexity and must be submitted as a raw file with no manipulations.

The winners beat 43,000 entries submitted from 96 countries.

Source: BBC



Shimu's fond Eid memories

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sumaiya Shimu, a familiar face of the small screen, has been in the scene for a while now. The artiste recently spoke with The Daily Star about her Eid memories.

"Actually, actors don't have the luxury of holidays except the two Eids. I have taken a short vacation for Eid-ul-Azha and Puja and hope to have a great time.

"As a child, I celebrated the festival in my hometown Narail. Both my grandparents were there and we visited them. Since I grew up in a joint family, numerous relatives came to visit on Eid day. We enjoyed lots then.

"My brother usually buys the sacrificial animal. The only time I've been to a haat is one of the most remarkable experiences of my life. As we all decided to go to haat at midnight, I first chose a red dress but soon changed the plan since it reminded me of the matadors attracting bulls!! Later, I preferred wearing pink. I even covered my face so as to avoid encounters with enthusiastic fans. We stayed there for one and a half hours and returned home with a cow.

"I have fond memories with friends on Eid. I, along with some 30-35 friends went to visit Padma resort in Munshiganj last Eid-ul-Fitr. We took five cars and started for our destination amid heavy downpour, which continued until our arrival. We tuned into the songs of Srikanta on way to the resort. We had a lot of fun during that trip. We took long walks, and posed for numerous photographs. It was an Eid to remember.

