

STAR-STRUCK

10th Bangladesh Astro-Olympiad

M H HAIDER

Exactly 100 years have passed since Albert Einstein presented his General Theory of Relativity. Since then, science and astronomy have reached new frontiers, broken age-old myths and came up with new baffling possibilities – although the curiosity and the quest for understanding the cosmos have probably been there since time immemorial.

It is this thirst for knowledge of the worlds and the interest in astronomy that Bangladesh Astronomical Association (BAA) strives to boost. An organisation founded in 1988, it carries out many activities – like star gazing – that encourage scientific thinking and cultivate a curious mind.

One such activity that BAA undertakes is Bangladesh Astro-Olympiad. On January 31, 2015 the competition was held for the 10th time. The Olympiad is a nationwide affair. After an

initial screening process that took place in several divisions and districts of the country, the national round was held at National Museum of Science & Technology.

This year, the competition was held in remembrance of Albert Einstein and the passing of a century of his General Theory of Relativity.

Students from all parts of Bangladesh came to the venue and attended a written test – covering drawing of constellations to queries about comets and various other celestial objects and theories.

The question paper was by no means an easy one; students excelling in this test reflect the enthusiasm and knowledge many youngsters possess about the universe. About 120 students took part in the national round. The test was followed by a lecture on cosmos.

Thirty-three contestants aced the examination – 15 from the senior category and 18 from the junior section. Tahmid Wasif of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology won the first position in the senior group; Md. Farhan Rawnak, a student of Armed Police Battalion Public School and College, Bogra stood first in

the junior category.

"We had a highly talented pool of students who are very well-read on the cosmos. It inspires me that there are such bright youngsters throughout the country who are such big astronomy enthusiasts," Milan Amin, founder, Bangladesh Astronomical Association said. "We are here to give them the right nudge."

The initiative does not end here. These 33 winners will undergo a rigorous training on astronomy, both theoretical as well as observational. Of them, 18 will be handpicked and sent to compete at international olympiads.

"Our country is still infiltrated with superstitions," said Imran Habib Rumon, Central Coordinator, Biggan Andolon Mancha. "We need to promote scientific thinking, because minds that are curious, inquisitive and scientific in their opinions and thoughts make up a better society."

The chief guest of the programme was Swapan Kumar Roy, Director General, National Museum of Science & Technology, and Additional Secretary, Ministry of Science and Technology. The event was held in association with The Daily Star, Biggan Andolon Mancha, Gangaforing and National Museum of Science and Technology. Ekattor TV was the media partner.

PHOTOS: REHMAN SOBHAN SONET

Rashomon: More than just a cinema

ECHOES BY
ASRAR
CHOWDHURY



In 1923 at the age of 13 he went with his elder brother Heigo to see the devastation of the Great Kanto earthquake that brought Tokyo and Yokohama to their knees. He turned his eyes away. Heigo forced him to look. The experience left an imprint in the mind of the young Akira Kurosawa (1910-1998). He went on to confront truth and reality in his movies. The 1950 classic "Rashomon" not only put Japanese cinema on the world map, it addressed two questions that have puzzled men forever: What is truth? What is reality?

A woodcutter and a priest sit beneath the Rajomon city gate as the rain pours. A commoner joins them. The woodcutter tells them how he found the dead body of a samurai while cutting wood in the forest. The priest says he saw the samurai and his wife the same day the murder happened. Thus the story starts.

The absolute is clear. The samurai died. There were two direct witnesses: the bandit and the samurai's wife. The court hears the views of all three. They hear the samurai through a spirit. The court also hears the story of the woodcutter who reported the incident to the authorities and who seemed to be the least unbiased.

At first, the four different narratives resemble the ancient story from South

Asia of the blind men and the elephant. Each blind man touches one part of the elephant and narrates his own story. Each blind man sees only one part of the whole elephant. Thus each narrative is a part of the whole truth. The story reminds us that the whole truth is almost impossible to find.

"Rashomon" is different. Each character (except the woodcutter) is a direct witness to the same event. They all see the same event from beginning to end. Yet all three and the woodcutter provide narratives that conflict each other. As the story unfolds and each narrative is presented, it's difficult not to ask what the actors themselves asked Kurosawa during the making of the film: 'What is the truth?'

Why do different people see the same event differently? Like a camera our minds have more than one focal point. When we look at an event, we tend to look through one focal point. Looking through more than one focal point at the same time can be difficult, but more importantly we don't want to look through more than one focal point. This is what Kurosawa addresses in "Rashomon" through his camera.

When scientists analyse a problem, they usually don't have a direct interest in the problem. They observe like a 'fly on



the wall'. When we have a personal interest in a problem, we don't see the whole event through all the focal points available to us. We become biased and form our own view and present it the way we think is best based on our personal conceptions.

Think about an event. Team A defeats Team B in a game. The next day you read the newspapers. You see two different and conflicting versions of the same game. What you observe is the personal interest of the narrator and how they present you the game as it happened. Reality is based on the perspective each narrator takes in their description. "Rashomon", however, goes one step ahead.

Art transcends boundaries when it becomes a 'fly on the wall' observation. In the end we appreciate the final message. Sixty-five years since it was made, "Rashomon" reminds us that when we can rise above personal interest, vanity and pride, we see like a 'fly on the wall'. We see the truth. If you haven't seen "Rashomon", you probably haven't made that personal journey to search for truth.

Asrar Chowdhury teaches economic theory and game theory in the classroom. Outside he listens to music and BBC Radio; follows Test Cricket; and plays the flute. He can be reached at: asrar.chowdhury@facebook.com