



PROF. DWIJEN SARMA

BOTANY

IT'S hard to fathom the beauty Dwijen Sarma moves through, a beauty that resides only in nature. And he has devoted his life to protecting it with everything he has. Bipradash Barua once called him 'well respected by trees'. Hayat Mamud refers to him as 'a great humanitarian of our time'.

Dwijen Sarma, botanist, naturalist and writer 'discovered' nature in his early childhood near Madhabkundu in Moulavibazar, spending time amidst the flora and fauna, the birds and the animals of the mountains. This inquisitiveness and love for nature took Dwijen Sarma, born on May 29, 1929 in Sylhet, to many countries in the world.

At home his father had built a large library that helped shape his enlightened worldview. After getting his MSc in Botany from Dhaka University in 1958, he joined the B M College in Barisal and taught there till 1962. He participated in the education movement of 1962 and got arrested and sent to prison for three months. His dream of undertaking PhD in a well-reputed foreign university was thus shattered as he could not get a passport due to the 'prison record'.

Refusing to give up, he started doing research at the University of Dhaka. Two more years and he would have obtained the PhD. Then he got an offer to work as a translator for Progress Publishers in the then Soviet Union. He left for Russia in 1974 with another dream—to learn from Russia's experience of socialism and come back to rebuild the newly independent country.

At Notre Dame College, where Sarma taught till 1974, he designed a landscape garden that still beautifies its campus. That's one thing about him—wherever he worked, he built gardens, which he believes are part of our being, something we need to keep

us sane in the midst of bricks and concrete.

While in Russia he translated several books on political science, economics, sociology and science from English to Bangla. From Moscow he would visit Europe to see the birth place of Darwin and the Kew garden, the holy grail of botanists all over the world. He would walk around in the Regents Park and St. James Park and make plans about designing our botanical garden in the same fashion. He would carry a lunchbox and spend the whole day in bookstores.

Dwijen Sarma has been relentlessly writing and working for more than 40 years to make people understand the importance of preserving the environment. Over the years he has sat on many high powered committees for the preservation of nature. "I cannot say even one of my suggestions has been implemented," he once bemoaned.

After coming back home in 2000, the ardent environmentalist was invited by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh to join them as an editor and translator. He served as vice president of Asiatic Society for three years. An encyclopedia of the flora and fauna of Bangladesh in 56 volumes was published by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh while he was the president of the publishing committee.

A recipient of numerous awards including the Kudrat-i-Khuda gold medal, Bangla Academy Award, Ekushey Padak, M Nurul Qader Children's Literature Award, and Nature Preservation Award by Channel i, he has more than 30 books to his credit. His *Shamoli Nishorgo*, *Shomajontre Boshobash*, *Jiboner Shesh Nei*, *Phoolgulo Jeni Kotha*, *Biggan Shikkha O Daibodhotar Nirikh* and *Nishorgo Nirman O Nandonik Bhabna* are considered classics by critics and readers alike.



FERDOUSI MAJUMDAR

DRAMA

FERDOUSI MAJUMDAR, one of the towering figures in Bangladeshi theatre, has a made rich contribution to the country's cultural arena. She is one of the leading figures of the neo-theatre movement which reshaped the country's theatre scenario in independent Bangladesh.

The virtuoso actor was born on June 18, 1943 in Barisal in a well-off Muslim family. Her father Khan Bahadur Abdul Halim was a District Magistrate. Ferdousi grew up in Dhaka in close contact with the cultural fraternity.

After completing HSC from Eden Girls' College, she earned her MA degree with a double major in Bangla and Arabic from the University of Dhaka. She started her professional career as a teacher at Agrani Girls' High School in Azimpur, and later taught at Wills Little Flower School for many years.

Ferdousi Majumdar stepped into the theatre arena through her brother Munier Chowdhury, a playwright, novelist, educationist and a martyred intellectual. She first played a role in Munier Chowdhury's *Roktakto Prantor* while she was still a college student.

After enrolling in Dhaka University, she acted in the play *Dando O Dando-dar* alongside her teacher Rafiqul Islam. Later, she became involved with a Dhaka University-based theatre forum. From then on, she continued to act in theatre productions and became a regular face on stage.

In 1972, when Abdullah Al Mamun and Ramendu Majumdar formed "Theatre", Ferdousi joined the newly-formed troupe. She is still working with the troupe, dedicating her life for the enrichment of Bangladeshi theatre.

She played key roles in many notable theatrical productions, including *Payer Awaz Paoa Jaye*, *Kokilara*, *Macbeth*, *Meraj Fakirer Maa*, and *Baramkhana*.

Not only in theatre, Ferdousi also

made her mark in other fields of acting: television drama and film. She has the rare glory of acting in the first play aired on Bangladesh Television (BTV).

In her illustrious career, spreading over four decades, she played a number of memorable roles in both theatre and television plays. Her role of *Hurmoti* in the drama serial *Shongshoptok* will forever be etched in the hearts of audience. Ferdousi Majumdar has acted in around 300 television plays till date.

Her notable television plays and serials include *Borof Gola Nodi*, *Ekhono Kritodas*, *Jibito O Mrito*, *Nivrito Jotone*, *Tahader Joubonkaal*, and *Shonkhoneel Karagar*.

She was so popular on stage that celebrated playwright-actor-director Abdullah Al Mamun would write plays keeping her in mind. Abdullah Al Mamun made an 86-minute documentary, *Jibon O Obhinoy* on Ferdousi Majumdar, which broadly focuses on her life as an actor.

The actor has also appeared in two films: *Maa-er Odhikar* and *Domka*. Besides, she also directed a number of plays. Her notable directorial works include *Krishnakanter Will*, *Chithhi*, *Tahara Tokhon*, *Meherjan Arekbar*, and *Mukut*, among others.

In recognition of her outstanding contribution to Bangla drama, Ferdousi Majumdar was awarded the Ekushey Padak, the highest civilian honour in Bangladesh.