



ARTS GAZE

CULTURE: THE PRESENT SITE FOR STRUGGLE

LUBNA MARIUM

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We, the children of the language and cultural movement, of Bangladesh are heart-broken to witness, unfolding before our eyes, the phenomenon of an alien and mutant culture overtaking the very consciousness of our progeny, our nation. This is a consequence of a two-pronged assault.

On the one hand the new Empire is the 'market' seeking to subjugate the world in the interest of transnational capital. As Marxist historian K.N. Panikkar eloquently states, *'the implicit purpose of the 'market', transmitted through the cultural network, is the creation of a modern, read capitalist, taste and the making of an uncritical mind'*. On the other hand, there is the growing inequity between the 'North' and the 'South', and the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'; generating anxiety and frustration for the multitudes unable to meet aspirations, created by the 'market culture', making it the ideal ground for the growth of religious radicalization, with its false goals of divine glory achieved through a culture of extremist retaliation.

Unfortunately, present times are post-ideological, where all encompassing ideologies seem to have apparently failed, generating a vacuum where cynicism reigns supreme. Posited on this is the uncritical mind, easily preyed on by forces of extremism, promising salvation, if not in the present world, surely thereafter.

The recent carnage in Dhaka is a wake-up call for the nation. It is an existential crisis that requires soul-searching to understand and standing up to.

Bangladesh has been an anomaly in a Muslim world, for having been able to thwart institutionalized fundamentalism and Wahabism. This has been possible only due to our historical cultural heritage, later strengthened by our Language and Cultural Movement. Unfortunately, at times we fail to appreciate the strength of our assimilative



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and plural cultural practices. We carry a couple of thousand years of heritage of compassionate thinking, promoted by our cultural practitioners - the bauls, the boyatis, and the folk performers - who constantly question irrational religious practices and beliefs. Not surprisingly, they still hold considerable sway in rural Bangladesh. Unfortunately, in our urban centers we have not only failed to recognize these strengths, but have also

distanced ourselves from these rustic practices. We have given in to the 'market', and thus to the consequent anxiety and frustration.

A corollary to this has been the total collapse of our systems of education. Whereas education needs to be 'formative', building character, moral strength and incorporating compassion; we have turned it into a totally 'informative' pedagogy, which aims to create clones of uncritical business executives, dumping liberal arts and its



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affiliate studies as non-marketable assets.

A war is being fought. But, as Hardt and Negri state in their 2000's blockbuster 'Empire', the battlefield, like the internet, has no centre - it is a 'non-place'. This is a world where proxy wars are being fought, and culture is the site for the struggle for supremacy.

The neo-Marxist theorist Gramsci, while propounding his theory of cultural hegemony, clearly stated that in order to

create and maintain a new society, you also needed to create and maintain a new consciousness. The need of the day, therefore, is 'cultural intervention'. Going back to Panikkar, 'Cultural action is an intervention in daily life, directed to the transformation of social consciousness.' It is only through these interventions that we can build a life free from domination, both by the 'market' and its retaliatory obscurantist religiosity.

Bangladesh is in a unique situation where cultural intervention is built into our plural cultural practices. It is time, now, to strengthen them, and bring them, not just into mainstream education, but also into mainstream discourse. Let us free ourselves from the domination of the structured world, and search beyond these imposed influences. As, our very own, Fakir Lalon sings, *'Devote yourself to knowing 'sahaj manush', your innate self, then may you find the truth in the present, within yourself'*.

I am forever an optimist and agree totally with Hardt and Negri's sweeping assertion that we are a creative and enlightened species, and that our history is that of humanity's progress towards the seizure of power from those who exploit it. While globalization has created the space for transnational economic exploitation, it has also connected people. Together this menace can be fought

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SAMIRA'S DESK

REPRESENTING BANGLADESH IN WORLD MUSIC DAY 2016

SAMIRA ABBASI

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A true artist who lives and breathes music has represented Bangladesh in World Music Day 2016, held at the Indian Museum in Kolkata recently. The first day I met this versatile artist Tanveer Alam Shawjeeb in his studio, he mesmerized me with chanting gong, a rare metal bowl like instrument with which he made ethereal music and my heart almost skipped a beat. Listening to that sublime sound I was thinking of the famous saying of a world class Indian classical dancer who said dance to the light of the temple. Shawjeeb has an amazing voice, trained well with classical background and he can play the piano like a virtuoso, his only love he says. What else he touches with music? The guitar, tabla, cajon, kazoo, banjo, dotara, ukulele and mouth organ. We are proud that such a dynamic artist has represented Bangladesh at this prestigious festival.

Borgi, an organization in Kolkata headed by Saumya Choudhury, planned

the World Music Day festivals in 2013 under the banner of Alliance Francaise du Bengale. Since then the festival has grown into the biggest mass festival in India with almost 700 musicians participating to celebrate World Music



Tanveer Alam Shawjeeb

Day. This year following Shawjeeb's performance, Purnadas Baul has rendered his presentation. The program was telecasted live in Durdarshan.

Shawjeeb is inspired by Bach, Mozart as well as the fertile soil of his

motherland. When asked how he had planned his 45 minute presentation, the well spoken artist said he had planned to begin with Nazrul, our national poet who also embodies versatility. Then he portrayed the different moods of our rich folk heritage, from romantic to birohi. He scheduled to take his audience into a journey to lush green Bangladesh with its simple kindhearted warm people with an invitation woven in romantic melodic to raga based classical renditions. He has also highlighted the artists who inspire him and represent who he is artistically. Another unique feature of the performance was that Shawjeeb sang only with his piano. He has accompanied musical stalwarts like Manna De, Anup Ghoshal, Shipra Basu as a musician.

The artist is enriched in different genres of world music starting from Irish to heavy metal. His vision is a beautiful one of the exchange of musical dreams and tunes across nations. Equipped with a bachelors in Sound Engineering from Toronto Film School of Canada he is

experimenting with different ways to mingle and break the musical barriers. Shawjeeb hoped to exchange his musical ideas with other fellow musicians in the auspicious occasion of meeting of musical minds at The World Music Day. His latest album "Latim" has been well received by the young listeners of both the Bengals. To criticize his work, one would say sometimes he is in a rush and needs to pause a bit and savor the moment in music. That will surely come with time and as he goes through life. An artist whose voice glides effortlessly in classical based songs yet sounds very modern in Jibon mukhi songs; his versatility is like the seasons of Bengal. I sincerely hoped that Shawjeeb would mesmerize the audience like he did me at his studio- to take his audience at the Kolkata Museum to a memorable journey to beautiful Bangladesh, with its luster, magic, beauty and opulent music. God speed, Shawjeeb!

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The author is a singer and writer. She is an Engineer by profession and the rest by passion.

