

An afternoon with the 'Dance Writers'

Dr Sunil Kothari and Smt Leela Venkataraman are two of the most noted dance critics of India. On the occasion of the 100th birth anniversary of late Manipuri dance guru Bipin Singh, they recently visited Dhaka. They elaborated about the scenario of dance criticism and the field of Manipuri dance in Bangladesh, in a recent interview with The Daily Star.

PRINYAKA CHOWDHURY

Dr Sunil Kothari is a noted Indian dance historian, scholar and critic. He is also the former Uday Shankar Professor at Ravindra Bharti University, Kolkata. A great writer in India, Dr Mulk Raj Anand inspired him to start writing on dance. A scholar of dance, Indian philosophy and Sanskrit, Dr Kothari eventually started writing for the Times of India. Awarded the Padma Shri in 2001, he also received the Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 1995.

Leela Venkataraman is a scholar, historian, commentator on the Indian dance and a brilliant orator. She has been involved in dance critiquing for thirty years, writing for several journals. Her writings were a regular feature for over three years in the Hindu, where she has been since 1985. She has also served on the Board of Kalakshetra Adyar Chennai for a full term of five years.

"The institution of criticism has been killed!" says Dr Kothari. "There used to be 9 English newspapers who would publish reviews but they don't publish them anymore, other than the Hindu. We both regret the fact that people don't read; instead they search for information online. I think that if you read a book, you become more knowledgeable and your sensibility improves."

Leela Venkataraman also believes that the platform for dance criticism is shrinking. "Food, fashion and films have become more important now," she says. "The space that is given, by the print media today, is limited. Being a dance critic alone cannot earn you a livelihood today."

Both Dr Kothari and Smt Venkataraman make it a habit to watch dance performances till the end. "If we need more information or we want to understand the ideas portrayed on stage, we go backstage and talk to the team," says Dr Kothari. "This way, our writing also gets better."



Smt Leela Venkataraman

Despite the fact that there is no known methodology to critiquing a piece of art form for both Dr Kothari and Smt Venkataraman, there are certain techniques that one develops over the years. "There are some dancers who, over time develop a feeling that they can't be critiqued," says Leela Venkataraman. "Thus, the art of saying what you have to say without offending the person needs to be developed. I am very particular about that fact that you can't keep on praising for the sake of praising, because that is the worst thing you can do to the art form. Your assessment should be such that you are looking at the person's art and not the person." She also stresses on the



Dr Sunil Kothari

fact that one must watch and experience the art form thoroughly before assessing and forming an opinion.

In the Manipuri dance festival, which took place last week, the young boys and girls used a rhythm called the 'pungchalam'. "The version of the rhythm was simple and not complicated," says Leela Venkataraman. "However, they were on the right track. The dancers showcased the right technique and a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and grace."

Their conversation went on for much longer. The legendary writers were very happy with the trip to Dhaka as it had also given them an opportunity to spend time together

and talk about dance. "This is my third visit to Bangladesh and it has always been rewarding for me," adds Dr Kothari. "We are both spellbound by the sensitivity of the Bangladeshi people for art and culture."

Getting ready for the photo shoot, the ever-ready Leelaji posed while Sunilji ran upstairs to grab his favourite chaddar to put on his shoulders.

For an artiste to develop their skills and techniques, there is definitely a need for critics who are passionate for the art. "As I always say," says Smt Venkataraman. "Artists have the license to fail sometimes. They can learn from it and move on."



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

RIAZ

Excited for Brazil

National award-winning actor Riaz has seen massive success in the world of cinema, TV, and modeling. His fans and admirers are eagerly waiting for what the actor has in store for them next. Currently, Riaz is excited about the World Cup, much like the rest of the world. He opens up about his hopes for his favourite team, Brazil, his hopes for the World Cup and more in a conversation with The Daily Star.

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Have you been keeping up with the World Cup?

Riaz: Unfortunately, I have not been able to watch every match. I have watched matches of the popular teams like Argentina, Germany, and of course, my personal favourite, Brazil.

Why do you support Brazil?

Riaz: First and foremost, I support Brazil because of Pele, one of the greatest football players we have seen. I think the Brazilian players are really capable. They have won the cup five times till now. I have been a Brazil supporter for as long as I can remember.

What are your thoughts on the match between Brazil and Serbia?

Riaz: Serbia did a really good job, while the Brazilian players gave it their best shot. I was disappointed that Neymar had a few misses, but I am very happy that they have moved on to the next round.

Who do you think will win the world cup this year?

Riaz: It is hard to predict who will win right now. This year, many teams that people had high hopes for did not play up to the mark, while the underdogs have been quite impressive. I was disheartened to see that Germany did not win the last match. But of course, I hope Brazil will win the World Cup this year!

Did you play football growing up?

Riaz: Yes, I did. I used to play football in my school days, back in my hometown, Faridpur. I have many fond memories of playing football, drenched in rain and under scorching heat. I even got into arguments with my friends over football.

Your fans have not seen you in any films lately. Why so?

Riaz: It is not that I have not been offered films, but I am being selective because I don't want to rush into anything. I have not come across something that I really like as of yet.



ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Today marks the 80th birth anniversary of veteran composer and one of the main organisers of Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, Ajit Roy. The creator of many timeless compositions, Ajit Roy received Swadhinota Padak in the year 2000 for his special contribution to music. On this birthday, The Daily Star family remembers the music maestro of Bangladesh.

Remembering the maestro on his 80th birth anniversary

A brave world of sculpture at BNM

ZAHANGIR ALOM

Prominent sculptor Ivy Zaman's fourth solo exhibition is now open at Nalini Kanta Bhattasali Gallery of Bangladesh National Museum. Titled "Brave World of Sculpture", the exhibition showcases diverse ideas in the form of sculptures and paintings. The exhibition was organised by Bangladesh National Museum in collaboration with Abinta Gallery of Fine Arts.

Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor, MP, inaugurated the exhibition on June 25. Renowned art critic Professor Borhan Uddin Khan Jahangir, eminent artists Samarjit Roy Choudhury and Rafiqun Nabi, renowned sculptor Hamiduzzaman Khan and others were present as special guests at the inaugural ceremony. The show will



remain open for all till July 10.

Expressing the hope that the exhibition will make the future generation more interested in art, Asaduzzaman Noor said, "Artists play a significant role to settle on the path of future. Their work shows the way to the society, poli-

tics and philosophy. Art and culture indicate a country's strength and progress."

The artist has predominantly showcased human figures, great feminine personality and animal forms. Apart from that, she has depicted abstract pieces with

organic forms using media like bronze, wood, rusted metal, cement, granite stone and more.

One of her sculptures titled "Image of Buddha" (bronze sculpture) shows a meditative Buddha while "The Cock Calling", a bronze as well, is a portrayal of a cock, with its neck stretched. "Affection and Crying Mother", another sculpture by Ivy, is a depiction of a mother's affection for her child.

Many of her paintings depict landscapes -- the setting sun, vegetation, fresh greenery, the flowing river and the mighty Himalaya. A few figurative paintings showing Buddha in different postures are also on display at the show.

Creating a connection between space and mass in diverse ways has become the hallmark of Ivy's works. She seeks motion in stillness, transforming her thoughts into reality.

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