

# THE DANCE CONNOISSEUR LUBNA MARIUM

*An eminent dancer, art director, researcher and cultural activist, Lubna Marium is a revered figure in the South Asian dance fraternity. The Vice President of 'World Dance Alliance' actively participates in various cultural organizations. She is appraised for her contributions to promoting Indian Classical and Indigenous dance forms among Bangladeshi dancers. In an interview with Rafi Hossain she talks passionately about her organization 'Shadhona' and 'Kolpotoru'.*

Enlighten us about your organization Shadhona.

Shadhona is a centre for advancement of South Asian dance and music that was initiated with the aim of revitalizing and expanding the horizons of classical dance and music in Bangladesh. Later we expanded and included all performing arts in South Asia. Shadhona works in four areas. First is research and documentation on cultural practices. Second is workshop. We call many local and international artists throughout the year and these artistes conduct training and workshops. Thirdly, we focus on creation, presentation and performance. Fourth is safeguarding of intangible cultural heritages. For example we are working on *Lathi Khela* for the last few years and we have started teaching *Monipuri* too. Shadhona promotes the rich cultural heritage of South Asia among young Bangladeshis through various events, workshops and training programs. We also provide scholarships to students.

Our sister organization *Kolpotoru* is a school for dance. I invite international dance artistes like Rajdeep Banerjee, Vandana and many other famous classical dancers from India and they train the students here.

Is it true that you have left your previous job and invested all your time and effort in Shadhona?

Yes, it is true. I left my job in *Thai Airways* and devoted all my time to Shadhona. Then in 1999 I went to India. I studied there for 7 years and came back in 2005. Then I started working to promote classical dance and preserve the cultural heritages in Bangladesh.

Is *Kolpotoru* solely a dance school?

It is a dance school. Although initially we taught music and tabla, later we entirely



focused on dancing and specialized in this field. Parents admit their children to complete diploma in dancing. We trained a batch for 9 years and they have completed their diploma. This same batch represented Bangladesh in the *Khajuraho Dance Festival* in India where they performed very well and gained a lot of appreciation. Our second batch is also ready to graduate. Critics like Sunil Kothari and Venkatesh came from India to watch these students' progress and they appreciated a lot. We have a third batch and we are training them also. The whole year we invite Indian artistes like Ramgopal, Rajdip Banerjee, Vandana and we conduct effective workshops on dancing. Moreover, famous Bangladeshi artists take dance classes in *Kolpotoru*. Sweetie Das Chowdhury teaches *Monipuri* dance. We have recently started teaching *Kathak* as well.

Is there any ethnic Bangladeshi dance form at all?

*Lathi Khela* and *Monosha Mongol* are ethnic Bangladeshi folk dance and these are very popular in all the rural villages. *Lathi Khela* has many forms and names.

Do you think it is possible to showcase Bangladeshi ethnic dance on the international platform?

Of course. Two scholars from Europe came to research on *Lathi Khela* and *Monosha Mongol*. This is a big achievement for us as Bangladeshi folk dance is

recognized on a global platform. I think *Ekushey Padak* should be awarded to Bangladeshi folk dancers also. We have many brilliant folk dancers in the country and it is high time we recognize them.

What are your upcoming plans?

I want to transform *Kolpotoru* into a cultural university where cultural studies and cultural management will be taught. We work with American Center and Indian Cultural Center. Shadhona believes in building regional bonds through cultural exchanges. Cultural diplomacy has taken place throughout the world in the recent years and I believe we can only mend global differences by communicating through culture. Have Bangladeshi dancers emerged and evolved in classical dancing?

Bangladeshi students are regularly winning in *Rabindra Bharati* in all the dance competitions. We have a lot of good dancing schools in Dhaka and new dancers are emerging which is a very positive sign.

Thank you for your time. It was wonderful talking to you!

Thank you for inviting me! I hope that the ethnic dance forms of Bangladesh will take over the international platforms in the coming days.

By Nafisa Ahmed



## 26 YEARS OF 'SHADHONA'

Shadhona is a trust initiated in 1992. The aim at the start was to revitalize and expand classical dance and music in Bangladesh. Throughout the years, Shadhona has expanded its horizon to include all types of performing arts. Their main goal has always been to promote the rich heritage of South Asia among young Bangladeshis. Shadhona focuses on all types of genres of art, but their main targets are research, training and production of the arts.

Shadhona researches different folk based performing arts. The Bangladeshi martial arts, *Lathi Khela*, the ritual to appease the Serpent Goddess *Manasa*, and many other cultural heritages of Bangladesh have been studied by Shadhona. The organization is also under contract with the research wing of UNESCO, the *National Crafts Council of Bangladesh*.

Throughout the year, Shadhona arranges a lot of workshops. All this is accomplished through a trust headed by Shadhona's Chairperson, musicologist Alimur-Rahman Khan, and a team of artists and support staff. Shadhona has been associated with various music and dance initiatives throughout the year.

Another major activity of Shadhona is the year-long scholarships that it has been providing to upcoming dancers for the past six years with assistance from the SAARC Women's Association. In 2012, Shadhona launched a feminist theatre dance project called *Shakti*. *Shakti* is a new initiative to empower young performers to include issues of social justice, viewed through the perspective of feminist ideology, and into their work in mainstream performance.

Shadhona has also helped save some endangered cultural projects. Their vision is to institutionalize new innovations within their cultural practices. They want to do this while still being linked to South Asian traditions. They want people to create spaces for critical reflection, based on the conviction that the art, and the artists who practice them, do not exist in a vacuum, but are participants shaping our cultures. And after 26 long years, they are inviting people to come and celebrate their 26th anniversary of initiatives and collaborations in arts.

By Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub

