



LIFE STYLE

Museum hopping IN DHAKA

Museums are boring, a common complaint goes. If you are amongst those who agree with this thought, think again! Museums are, in fact, a very powerful and entertaining medium of learning. Perhaps you have not been to the 'right' museums yet, the ones that would appeal to you? Museums do not just deal with history, arts, or culture. They can actually be of literally anything. If you explore museums, you would sooner or later find one which would you would love.

Dhaka has more than a dozen museums. Some of them are prominent; some, relatively new or less known. This week, Star Lifestyle takes you on part one of a tour of the myriad museums in the capital. Flip through to page 12 to start your journey of exploration and don't miss part two, coming next week!

The saga of the Victory of Bangladesh in 1971 involves numerous revolutions, and of course, the War. And the glorious road to Victory will be cherished by its people forever. Hence, rightfully so, Dhaka boasts plenty of museums on the subject. They collectively bear testament to the struggles of the Bengalis.

In celebration of the upcoming Victory Day, we present to you these museums and their depictions of those struggles through which a proud people emerged victorious.

THE PRICE OF A LANGUAGE

When 'Urdu and only Urdu' was the call, the Bengalis could not keep silent. 'Rashtr bhasha Bangla chai' was the demand. Students took to the streets in protest.

And the police opened fire to silence them. It was 21st February, 1952. Abul Barkat, a Dhaka University student, was one of those who lost their lives.

The cost of getting the Bengali language its due recognition was blood.

There is a museum in the Polashi circle in memory of this martyr: Bhasha Shahid Abul Barkat Shriti Jadughor O Shongrohos hala. The museum tells the history of the Language Movement at large, but also puts a focus on Barkat.

So, along with exhibits such as newspaper reports about the movement and visuals of the processions, visitors can see a

number of pieces related to Barkat, such as his Dhaka University certificate, letters, and the prestigious Ekushey Padak medal that was awarded to him posthumously.

The Language Movement, one may say, was a foundation or a prologue of the series of events

that was to follow in the coming years.

Weekly closure: Friday-Saturday

ACCUSED OF SEDITION

In 1968 the historic trial State Versus Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Others - better known as Agartala Conspiracy Case - was commenced, where the leader and others were accused of sedition.

The trial was held in a building in the cantonment, which is now a museum.

Bijoy Ketan Museum, through display boards, a large selection of weapons that were used in the war, etc. gives glimpses of the liberation war in general.

But the most attractive part of the museum is perhaps the room where the court used to sit. It has a unique feel to it, given the quintessential courtroom structure to the ambience that arouses nostalgia for an era long gone.

The courtroom-turned-museum is soaked in history. After all, it was in this very place where Sheikh Mujib and the co-accused struggled for their freedom in the highly dramatic trial.

The masses also demanded for their freedom. And the murder of Sergeant Zahurul Haque (one of the accused) infuriated the protesters further. On February of 1969, the case was withdrawn, with the release of the accused.

On 23 February, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was honoured with the title of Bangabandhu. The Friend of Bengal had emerged.

REMEMBERING 7TH MARCH

After Bangabandhu's overwhelming victory in East Pakistan at the general elections of 1970, the President of Pakistan postponed the National Assembly session for an indefinite period, thus angering the public.

The idea of an independent Bangladesh was becoming clear in the face of oppression and violence.

With that context, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman addressed a mammoth crowd at Suhrawardy Udyan on 7th March, 1971. The fiery speech seared the desire of independence among the Bengalis.

In commemoration of the historic speech, a museum has been established in Saat March Bhaban inside Rokeya Hall at Dhaka University campus. The museum tells many stories of Bengalis' struggles towards freedom, such as the role of women in the liberation war, and of course, it highlights the speech itself.

After all, the legendary speech - a shining example of Bangabandhu's charisma - was a pivotal point for the Bengalis to prepare for the War that was brewing in a not-so-distant future.

And a bloody war it was. From records of horrors to the epics of valiant freedom fighters, and from the administrative role of the government-in-exile to the campaigns to raise international support and awareness, there are many fascinating facets of the nine-month war.

The three aforementioned museums approach the subject of our freedom from particular angles. And the following three portray the multifaceted war in a more comprehensive fashion:

THE MUSEUM OF INDEPENDENCE

Located in Suhrawardy Udyan, the underground museum narrates the Bengalis' struggles throughout the ages, mainly with the help of a large number of visuals.

For example, a dark corridor - which houses several photographs of the massacres of the Pakistani army - complete with intelligent lighting - does not fail to impress the visitors. There is also an audio-visual hall for screening.

Weekly closure: Thursday

BANGLADESH NATIONAL MUSEUM

Pick your favourite gallery at the national museum. The large institution does not only deal with the liberation war; it covers a wide plethora of fields.

It also highlights the episodes of the rebellion and heroism of the Bengalis. Galleries 37 to 40 narrate the chapters, stringing them together in one unified tale. The rich collection of artefacts, photographs, memorabilia et al make this section of the museum a treasure trove for anyone interested in Bangladesh history.

Weekly closure: Thursday

LIBERATION WAR MUSEUM

Having moved out of Segunbagicha into the spacious premises in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar,

Liberation War Museum is now housed in a splendid building.

The galleries systematically reveal the story of the liberation, starting from history of ancient Bengal, and moving forward to the various revolts and uprisings this land has seen throughout.

The route through the galleries has been smartly planned, thus giving visitors a clear understanding of the struggles of the Bengalis. With abundant use of imagery, footages related to the War, info-graphics, and the numerous war memorabilia on display, the museum keeps the narrative alive and absorbing for visitors.

Much of it can be attributed to the presentation itself. Operation Searchlight, to illustrate, has been depicted in a dimly lit tunnel-like section. A military vehicle - with its headlights on - further adds to the ambience.

Weekly closure: Sunday

A HOME LIKE NO OTHER

One ought to pay a tribute to the leader with whose vision and dream the great victory was attained.

Bangabandhu's residence in Dhanmondi is a

must-visit. An annexe has been added in the premises, which focuses on the life of the great leader, and inseparably, presents the story of our freedom.

And the home itself, one may say, gives intimate glimpses of Sheikh Mujib as a family man and brings forth the man behind the legend.

The house also stands as a testament to the massacre that took place in 1975. Exhibits such as bullet marks and the solemn presentation at the stairway where Bangabandhu lay dying remind us of the assassination when he and most of his family were murdered.

Weekly closure: Wednesday

HOLDING ON

Museums depicting war and liberation provide us with solemn reminders of the sacrifices made and the glories of a proud people who refuse to succumb to oppression - a long, chequered road to Victory.

By M H Haider

Photo: Journeyman/LS
Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

