

Crosstalk: Of Arts & Culture

Paragon of modern art in Bangladesh, renowned painter Rafiqun Nabi, also known as 'Ronobi' is a name that is revered by all. His remarkable woodworks, acrylic paintings, water colours and his iconic cartoon character, 'Tokai', makes him stand apart in the crowd of art paramours. Versatile artist, Afzal Hossain, mostly known for his drama roles in the 80s and 90s, also plays a significant role as a writer, painter and poet in the industry. Hobby turned into passion, Durjoy Rahman is an art collector, who treasures unique artworks and exhibits them to spread the love of art among others. Following the series, Crosstalk, this week Star Showbiz presents these three cultural personalities, who share their thoughts on the evolution of art form and talk about the promoters of culture in Bangladesh.

COVER STORY

Rafiqun Nabi: Rafiqun Nabi sir, can you share your thoughts on the current state of art culture in our country?

Rafiqun Nabi: Talented artists like, Zainul Abedin, Quamrul Hassan, SM Sultan and Qayyum Chowdhury are few names who are considered as the pioneers of Bangladeshi art. The thing is, with each time period, the art culture changes. It reflects the current mindset of the people. The financial, social and political state dictates the direction art is going to take. So, the art we have now is fitting to our current times.

Rafiqun Nabi: Sir, do you think television programmes are promoting our art and culture?

Rafiqun Nabi: I do not watch television. However, if I do, I prefer watching selected programs. I used to watch some selected telefilms. But, now I don't continue that practice anymore. Still, when I see some familiar faces like Afzal Hossain or Suborna Mustafa, I tend to watch their programs. There is a possibility of finding some good content in them. According to my observation, nowadays, I have seen the use of local language of different districts in our country in dialects and characters. I don't think we really need that. Just one or two regional character is enough in my opinion. I'm saying all this because the regional

languages of our country geographically changes every ten miles. So, it is somewhat impossible to work with all of them. I also feel that the satirical approach of promoting the regional languages in dramas or films is sometimes disrespectful. Back in our times, everything was made with time and dedication. Now, due to advanced technology and digital mediums, work has become easily accessible and fast. The rising stars of this generation are doing well. They are participating in various competitions, both in Bangladesh and abroad, and through their participation, our Bangladeshi culture is being promoted to wider horizons. There are talented artists who are delivering remarkable projects. Everyone is busy doing great work and trying to bring changes.

Rafiqun Nabi: With modern techniques and accessible technologies, I feel that many people are doing contemporary art, just to follow the trend, without even understanding it properly. Durjoy Rahman, what's your take on that?

Durjoy Rahman: I don't think it's fair to assume that the artists in Bangladesh don't understand contemporary art. Many do know what they're doing, and the ones that don't, get to exercise their skills. This way, they have the scope to learn about contemporary art. There's nothing wrong with doing that if someone



is truly passionate about it, even if they have limited knowledge on it. Also, I think that people should clarify what they call contemporary art. Many believe that every new type of painting is contemporary, and that's very incorrect.

Rafiqun Nabi: Afzal Hossain, what is your take on all of this?

Afzal Hossain: Ever since the liberation war of Bangladesh, the most developed cultural sector has been the sector of painting. I feel that the main reason for this is the increase in people's interest in art. This change can actually be observed in people all over the world. When I'm abroad, I like seeing different artworks from that country as I'm very interested in art. When I observe different artworks from around the world, I feel that Bangladeshi paintings have similar value to those abroad. However, I think Bangladeshi art is not being promoted properly to greater masses. It is our responsibility to introduce our art to the world.

Rafiqun Nabi: Durjoy Rahman, you recently did a project in Venice with six young artists from Bangladesh and six from abroad. Can you tell us about that?

Durjoy Rahman: I feel that the artwork we have here is of international standards, but what we lack is exposure and promoters. I saw many artists get no exposure at all, and I really wanted to help them get international attention. But, I realised that if I made an art residency using Bangladeshi artists, it wasn't going to get that much attention. So, I decided to do *Majhi International Art Residency*, where we promoted six artists from Bangladesh, and also worked with some Venetian local ones. This year, we held it at Venice because throughout history, Venice has been a very important place for art. Moreover, I feel that our artists aren't the only ones that got exposure there; the Venetian artists also learnt from them. I'd say that it

was a cultural exchange.

Rafiqun Nabi: Whenever I go to art exhibitions abroad, I always want to see a painting by a legendary Bangladeshi artist. You're doing a lot of work with international exhibitions, Durjoy Rahman. Do you think that it will ever happen?

Durjoy Rahman: The thing is, to do expositions or symposiums abroad for legendary painters, like Zainul Abedin and S M Sultan, we will require permission from the government as the artists' most beloved artworks are currently under their possession. So, if we are to display the paintings of legendary artists, we need the government to assist us.

Afzal Hossain: It saddens me that we can't showcase the contributions that these legendary artists made to the world through their art. For example, we have Rafiqun Nabi sir with us, and his work is astounding, no matter what platform he uses. But, the thing is, most people in our country don't even know of his work. Many people know him for the cartoons he made, and he is also known by people abroad. I don't think that's enough. Artists aren't getting the attention they deserve, and many have to promote themselves. It's very difficult to focus on one's artwork, while simultaneously trying to promote it. When we talk about promoting art and culture, I also have to mention Shahadat Chowdhury. He is someone whose thinking was way ahead of his time. But, sadly, we never remember him as we should. We don't even remember his birth or death anniversary. But, it was him who made cartoons famous.

Rafiqun Nabi: I would like to take the opportunity to talk about my school friend, Shahadat Chowdhury. He was the one who helped me make the character, Tokai. He was a very creative person, and he used to write a lot of short stories. He took part in the Liberation War. He was a journalist, and after the war, he made

