



Poster of a film by Zahir Raihan

Remembering the legendary ZAHIR RAIHAN

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Zahir Raihan is a pioneer, a legend. His films and novels, portraying the social reality and depicting the veracity of the Liberation War remain classics to this date. Today marks the death anniversary of this great trendsetter.

Zahir Raihan's first film was "Kokhono Asheni", starring Sumita Devi, Khan Ataur Rahman, Sanjiv Dutt and Shabnam. It was released in 1961, leading to his commercial success "Behula" (1966), an adaptation of popular folklore, featuring Suchonda and Abdur Razzak. This was Nayok Raj Razzak's debut film, which was initially released in Urdu. Raihan's second Urdu language film "Sangam" (1964) was the first colour film made in Pakistan. He went on to deliver another hit with the duo in 1967, titled "Anwara" a film based on a novel by Mohammad Nazibur



Zahir Raihan

for best direction. His other notable works include "Sangam" and "Jibon Theke Nea", among numerous others. His documentary, "Stop Genocide", received international acclaim.

He collaborated with Kalim Sharafi to deliver another masterpiece "Sonar Kajol" in 1962. After back-to-back commercial successful ventures, the Ekushay Padak award went on to produce the evergreen movies "Dui Bhai" (1968), "Shuorani Duorani" (1968) and "Bairagi" (1967).

Raihan also managed to earn fame as an author since he had begun to work as a writer at "Juger Alo". Following the success of his first short story collection "Suryagrahan" in 1956, he went on to become the editor of Probaho in 1956. He was honoured with the Bangla Academy Literary Award in 1972, Adamjee Literature Award for "Hajar Bachhar Dhole" (novel) in 1964 and the Independence Day Award in literature novels (1992). His other works include "Trishna" (1962), "Arek Falgun" (1969), "Borof Gola Nodi" (1970), "Ar Koto Din" (1970), "Ekushey February" (1970), and "Koekti Mrittu" (1970).

Zahir Raihan went missing on January 30, 1972, after he went in search of his brother, renowned writer Shahidullah Kaiser, who is believed to have been captured and killed by the Pakistani Army during the final days of the 1971 Liberation War.



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Rahman.

His film, "Kacher Deyal" (1963), narrating a story of womanhood and sacrifice, projects a unique interpretation of feminism. The film casts Anwar Hossain, Sumita Devi, Khan Ataur Rahman, Rani Sarkar, Inam Ahmed and Shawkat Akbar among many others. This film went on to receive the Nigar Award

DRAMANGLE

The best that theatre had to offer in 2020

ABDUS SELIM

2020 was not a very eventful year for live theatre, as the world of performances, where social mingling is one of the prime cultures, was viciously invaded by the Covid-19 pandemic. The situation was no different in Bangladesh too—in fact, the world of theatre last year underwent a kind of hibernation, and theatre activists are not very optimistically animated about 2021 either, though they have firm faith in the maxim: *The show must go on.*

In Bangladesh, in spite of strict social distancing, there had been multiple online performances by a number of theatre groups until early October 2020. In Dhaka from mid-October, the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy National Theatre Hall, along with a few other theatrical auditoriums, were opened for theatre groups austerely, maintaining all health and hygiene protocols. Subsequently, a flood gate of enthusiasm overwhelmed, denoting that this particular art, despite many stumbles across centuries of its existence, is destined to survive.

Though 2020 was a barren year for performing arts all over the world, in Dhaka, things appeared to be quite productive at the fag end, as six new plays came on to the stage in the months of October and December: "Ekti Loukik Othoba Oloukik Steamer", "Mulya Omulya", "Paake Bipaaake", "Major", "Objection Overruled", and "4.48 Montrash".

"Ekti Loukik Othoba Oloukik Steamer", produced by Dhaka Theater, written by Anan Zaman, and directed by Shahiduzzaman Selim, exemplified a perpetual theatrical journey during the pandemic, as accentuated by Nasiruddin Yusuf Bacchu, the founder high patron of the group. In the play, the *Steamer* symbolises the marker of emancipation for all of us during this deadly pandemic. "Mulya Omulya" is an adaptation by Ashit Mukhopadhyay from one of Arthur Miller's famous plays "The Price" that deals with the onslaught of profiteering mechanism sponsored by the state and society, and free economy, and their trickledown



Objection Overruled

collective impact on joint families. The play is directed by Mohammad Bari under the banner of the group, Onuswar.

"Paake Bipaaake", written by Monoj Mitra, is a theatrical production by Padatik. Though the storyline dwells upon that age-long linear theme of exploiter and exploited tension, the fact is it has not lost its relevance even in the 21st century. Shanjib Kumar Dey did the directorial work for the play. *Major* happens to be a collaborative production of two theatre groups—Shobdo Natya Chorchha Kendro and Prangonemore Natyadal. The play is restructured and directed by Ananta Hira from its original "Mriter Atmahotya" written by the reputed literature and academic late Abul Fazal. The theme is based on post-liberation volatile state-of-affairs after the heinous killing of Bangabandhu.

As for *Objection Overruled*, it is a feminist play with the distressing and troubling anecdotes of an Iranian woman named Rehane Jabir. The play is produced



Mulya Omulya



Major

PHOTOS: COLLECTED

Musings with artist Ayesha Sultana

PRIYANKA CHOWDHURY

Ayesha Sultana, an artist based in Dhaka, is recognised across the globe. She sets herself apart through her practice that is uncommon in the South Asian context. Her work has been showcased in Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in New Delhi, alongside the works of celebrated Indo-American artist and printmaker Zarina Hashmi, as well as artists Lala Rukh, Prabhavathi Meppayil, and Sumakshi Singh last year. In conversation with *The Daily Star*, Ayesha sheds light on her artistic journey.

She is hugely inspired by Indian artist Nasreen Mohamedi and Pakistani artist Rashid Rana. Her work is experimental and abstract to a great extent, involving different materials and processes.

Her school teacher, Fariha Zeba, recommended a South Asian foundation's art



Ayesha Sultana

scholarship to her. As part of the first batch of the exchange programme, Ayesha arrived in Beaconhouse National University in Lahore in 2003. She spent the first night at artist Salima Hashmi's residence.

"The visual arts curriculum of the programme was multidisciplinary with overlaps, and we were introduced to different techniques and ideas of various disciplines," she recalled. The first year was an emotional,

yet exciting journey for her. Her tutors Huma Mulji, Rashid Rana and Salima Hashmi were truly nurturing. In 2009, Ayesha returned to Dhaka after completing her BFA and postgraduate diploma from Beaconhouse National University in Lahore. Ayesha also taught there for two years.

In 2014, she was honoured with The Samdani Art Award, as a part of which she went to Delfina Foundation for a three-



Install view of Ayesha's 'Breath Count' series (2019-2020; clay-coated paper) at Dhaka Art Summit 2020.

PHOTO: RANDHIR SINGH

month residency. She is a member of the artist-run organisation, Britto Arts Trust, based in Dhaka.

Ayesha's father was in the Bangladesh Air Force. He travelled extensively, and enjoyed clicking photos. Those images offered the initial windows of 'seeing' for her. Upon her return to Dhaka, she deliberately removed figures from her early practice and concentrated more on drawing that she calls therapeutic. "Watercolour takes a long time. Drawing, on the other hand, feels more freeing and immediate," she explained. Ayesha is quite minimalistic in her approach, experimenting with texture, objects, and spaces in mundane presentations.

She is also avid notetaker, and maintains a 'dream journal'. "I remember my dreams quite vividly. I have assimilated these dreams notes in my work," she shared. Her work of clay-coated paper was displayed at the Dhaka Art Summit in 2020.

People usually enjoy the repetitions and rhythmic playing with light and darkness, in her works. The artist also loves working with paper and graphite. In her words, paper is a versatile and malleable object. She is known for her works based on shimmering, graphic-dusted surfaces of paper that are cut and reassembled in geometric forms, before being

mounted on diamond paper.

During the conversation, Ayesha shared an anecdote from her childhood. "We lived in Kuwait and I distinctly remember the ray of light that traversed from my mother's bedroom to mine. That light remains an inspiration in my work," she said.

While visiting Italy around 2011, she was inspired to take up a monochromatic approach. She spent time there visiting

churches and making sketches inside the ancient buildings. She also went to various painting exhibitions. "My most memorable visit was in Padova, Arena Chapel. I was completely blown away by the works of Giotto. I was not making art at the time, but I was thinking about it," she said.

Dhaka and its architecture play an integral role in Ayesha's works. In 2014, the artist had her first solo exhibition at Experimenter Gallery in Kolkata. The works on exhibit had references to corrugated tin sheets, commonly used for roofs and wall boundaries with the rhythm of their grooves, replicated on paper. Ayesha has two publications, "Form Studies" and "Napli Drawings".

Ayesha's work has been supported by a number of galleries. She believes that the audience plays an important role in the presentation of her art. "With an ecosystem of artists and art supporters, often there are expectations to be met. However, an artist can still have the freedom of their practice," she explained. Currently, the artist is working on some watercolour works and preparing for a solo at Experimenter Gallery in February.

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Anam Biswas's 'WTFry' is a quirky tale about contrasting worlds

SHARMIN JOYA

ZEE5 Global released "WTFry", their second web original from Bangladesh, on January 9.

The Anam Biswas directorial featured actor Bidya Sinha Saha Mim and musician turned actor Pritom Hasan in the lead roles. Iresh Zaker also played an important role in this project. "WTFry" marked popular video content creator Sakib Bin Rashid's acting debut.

This Zee5 original film revolves around a movie star, who is a part of the modern, social media driven world. She declares that she will attempt suicide, on



The poster for the web film.

a Facebook live video. A simple yet lively young boy, coincidentally saves her life.

"The story depicts the contrasts between the real and the fake lives of two individuals, who happen to cross paths, and somehow fall for each other. However, no certain romance is shown between them," shares Anam. "The film star, played by Mim, is bipolar. She leads a complicated life and attempts suicide. On the other hand, Pritom's character lives his life naturally in the moment, which is very rarely seen today."

Anam also shared that he approached Pritom and Sakib, because he wanted to cast non-actors in the film. According to the director, both of them are natural performers.

by Anurag Theater and written and directed by Mahbub Alam.

Noticeable, I have saved one particular play, 4.48 *Montrash*, that needs a special mention. It is a play directed by Syed Jamil Ahmed, a theatre activist, director, academic and scholar, who is equally praised and criticised after every single theatrical production of his, and this one is no exception. The play he directed this time is originally written by an English playwright Sarah Kane titled "4.48 Psychosis", translated by Shahman Moishan and Sharif Shiraj. Sarah suffered from psychotic disorders with symptoms of delusions and hallucinations most of which she depicted in all her five plays before she committed suicide in 1999, and "4.48 Psychosis" was her last play—the title of which originates from the time she felt depressed and often woke. The content of the play suited Jamil's line of directorial philosophy quite well, for it has no overt storyline, definite number of characters or any stage directions.

Jamil, in recent days, is much more leaned towards narrative devices wherein story unfolds abstractly and many dramatis personae speak directly to the audience, breaking the fourth wall conventionally defined by Konstantin Stanislavski. It is today's top trending theatre practice.

Intriguingly enough, many of the audiences at Mahila Samity, where it ran for two weeks at a stretch in December, felt exactly like what Sarah's critics wrote,

"How on earth do you award aesthetic points to a 75-minute suicide note"; or "it is impossible not to view it as a deeply personal howl of pain". Though Syed Jamil Ahmed has tried to draw a parallel between the causes of the psychotic condition of the lead female character and that of ours in Bangladesh, I have a feeling most of the audiences felt quite distanced from the ultimate message of the play. Either Jamil is a prisoner of his own ego, or he is ahead of our time.

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The pairing of Pritom and Mim was appreciated.

"WTFry", produced by Good Company, received mixed reactions from viewers. "There have been both positive and negative reactions regarding the film," shares Anam. "Although we had an excellent experience working with ZEE5 Global and Good Company, I wish we gave some more time to the post production work."

The director feels positive about the state of web-based content around the country. "I believe that different global platforms entering the market now will change the medium of entertainment overall," he says.

Mim also spoke about working on "WTFry". "I was offered the role by Good Company, and I liked the plot," she says. "This was my first project with ZEE5 Global, Anam and Pritom. I enjoyed working with the team."

The actor also shared that Pritom and her had an interesting chemistry, as a fresh on-screen pair. They had a great time together on the sets as well.

Anam will be directing one of the three tele-fictions this year for the Valentine's Day Special of "Closeup Kachhe Ashar Golpo".

Mim, on the other hand, is currently working on her upcoming film, "Damaal", and is preparing for several web projects.