

In conversation with ABUL HAYAT

Noted actor, playwright, and director Abul Hayat has won the hearts of millions with his remarkable performances on radio, television, the silver screen, and the stage throughout decades. Two of his books were launched at this year's Ekushey Boi Mela. So far, he has authored a total of 34 books. He plays a pivotal role in the Tauquir Ahmed directorial "Sphulingo", which was released in movie theatres on the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence. In a candid chat with The Daily Star, Abul Hayat talks about the film, and more.

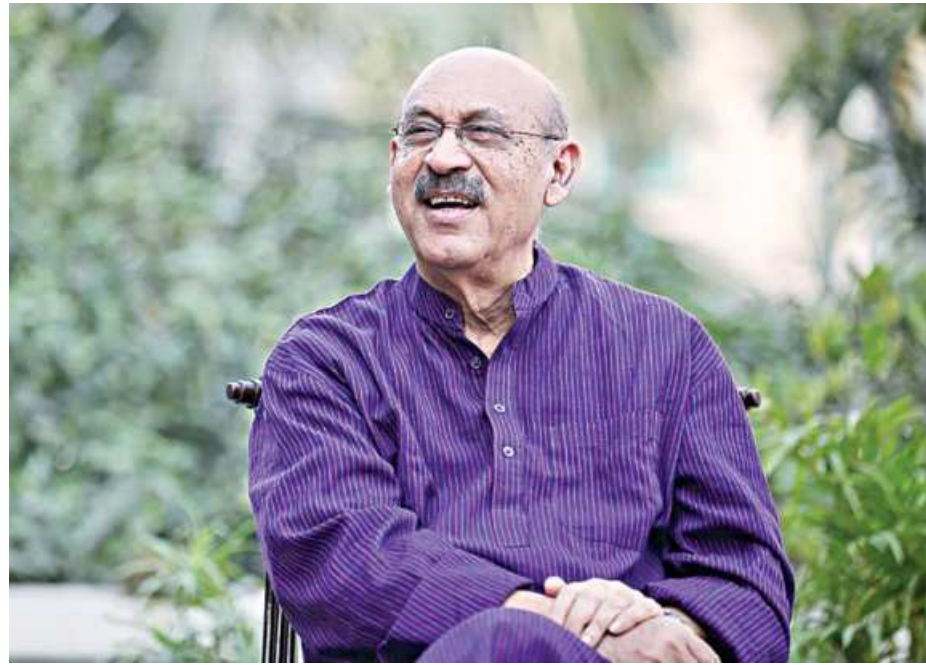


PHOTO: STAR

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Your books, "Shopner Brishti" and "Duti Moncho Natok" were launched at the Ekushey Boi Mela. What can you tell us about them?

While "Shopner Brishti" is a fiction book, "Duti Moncho Natok", as the name suggests, features two plays. I actually wrote the stories that are now included in "Shopner Brishti" as screenplays for television. We could not work on them because of the Covid-19 outbreak.

Eventually, I decided to write the stories as a book. I worked hard to transform the screenplays into a book. "Duti Moncho Natok" focuses on the plays, "Moddhano Bhoj Ki Hobe?" and "Shodh". Dhaka Stage Monchonanayan will be performing "Shodh", and Monchosarothi Ataur Rahman will direct "Moddhano Bhoj Ki Hobe?".

Do you have plans to write an autobiography?

Actually, my autobiography is in the works. Through it, I hope to shine a light on my career, childhood, and life lessons. As an experienced artist, I have a lot to share.

What can you tell us about your role in "Sphulingo"?

I play a minor, negative role in "Sphulingo". Actually, my daughters did not want me to act in this film because of the pandemic. Even Tauquir himself asked me to let it go. However, I believe Tauquir makes brilliant films, and I wanted to work with him. He has carved a space for himself as a director. "Sphulingo" is an important film, focusing on our nation and the youth. I hope that people like our work.

Translated by Shababa Iqbal



A snippet from "Behula"

The mercurial success of Shunno's "Behula"

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

At the time of writing this article, Shunno's latest single "Behula" has been 'trending' as number one on YouTube's music segment for the past 6 days. The music video, animated by Antik Mahmud, touched a million views almost instantaneously, and the song recently crossed the four million milestone.

While it is arguably one of the most astonishing achievements by a Bangladeshi band ever, it would be naïve to assume that Shunno's latest single can attribute its success to just luck.

"It was a one-year process," says Imrul Karim Emil, the vocalist and frontman of Shunno. "We focused hard on the process of bringing out an interesting story, rather than just releasing another hit song."

Before their previous hit single, "Bibiya", Shunno did not have a new release for quite a while. "After a gap of almost three years, we wanted our next set of songs to represent different stories within our country," he says. "It is astonishing that Behula received the love it did from the audience, I did not expect it at all."

Emil says that the concept was a group effort, a result of lengthy discussions with the lyricist, Tanvir Chowdhury. He also attributes the tonal quality to the producer of the song, former Shunno guitarist Shaker Raza. "He has been instrumental in the process, and we trust Shaker's visions with our eyes closed," says the vocalist.

Behula is a mythical tale from these lands. In the story, Behula's husband, Lakhindar, is bitten by a poisonous snake because of



Shunno

his forefathers' refusal to worship serpent goddess, Manasha.

Behula tries to win Lord Shiva's approval through dance. Content with her dance, Shiva negotiates with Manasha to give back Lakhindar his life.

Shunno's brought a fresh angle to the story through and infusing a 'video-game' aesthetic, and retelling it through the eyes of Lakhindar. "The song is a tribute to the strong women in our lives, who constantly sacrifice for the success of their loved ones."

The band plans to release songs regularly

as of now. "You can expect a cricket-themed song before the next world cup," says Emil. "I would like to thank all the fans for the tremendous support, it really does fill us with the resolve to continue with what we love to do."

Behula's success marks a positive shift in attitude towards band music, which some consider 'acceptable' only if it maintains a 'niche' and 'underrated' persona. In truth, good music is to be loved by everyone, irrespective of taste and gatekeeping tendencies.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF SAMINA HUSAIN PREMA

Samina Husain Prema on her performance at MUJIB CHIRANTAN

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Acclaimed Manipuri dancer Samina Husain Prema has been gracing the audience both home and abroad with her beautiful performances. The dancer recently performed at the acclaimed Mujib Chirantan programme with her dance troupe Bhabna and many other promising dancers from all around the country. In a candid chat with The Daily Star, the artiste shares her experience and a lot more.

Tell us about the theme of your recent performance at the ten-day Mujib Chirantan programme.

Our dance recital, 'Dhonno Shei Purush' featured the legacy of the Father of The Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman through poems and songs written by Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Shamsur Rahman, and Nirmalendu Goon.

Conceptualised by me, the choreography was scripted by Jayanto Chattopadhyay, and Suman Sarker arranged the music. The music was a medley collected from recorded performances by artistes of Chhayanaut, Jagoroner Gaan and Obhduro Sangeet Angon. It also included poetry recitals by Jayanto Chattopadhyay and Dahlia Ahmed. I am thankful for the opportunity to present something different.

Who shared the stage with you in this performance?

I performed with members of my dance troupe Bhabna -- and as it was a grand performance, I had to reach out to many other dancers from all over the country to



execute my choreography. We started with 40 performers but unfortunately, 7 of them tested positive for Covid-19 just a few days before the performance. We were left with 33 dancers including myself for the performance on March 24.

How did you come up with the choreography, keeping the theme of the day in mind?

As this year marked 50 years of our independence and the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, I tried to convey the message of equity, strength, and peace. After we had come across the Akram Khan's production "Father", everyone decided to opt towards his foreign essence. However, I decided to break out of the trend and opt for a different authentic choreography highlighting these aspects in

traditional way.

How did you manage to prepare this huge group performance amid such a pandemic? What were the major challenges?

Firstly, due to having numerous performances at this grand celebration, I was unable to find enough dancers. We recruited dancers from outside Dhaka as well, and this is how I got my troupe for this performance.

I am thankful to Zeenat Afroza, who helped us a lot by letting us use Excel Academy's premises to rehearse. After a month of hard work, we were able to complete our production.

However, all our efforts seemed to have paid off when Jayanto Chattopadhyay himself called me after the performance and said, "It could not have been better Prema...!"

Shehzad Chowdhury's "Chaa Porbo" explores a conversation with the self

JAHANARA TARIQ

"Chaa Porbo (Tea Time)", an exhibition by noted artist Shehzad Chowdhury, is taking place at The Flourist, in Dhaka's Gulshan 2. Curated by Saria Saguaro, the show features a striking collection of artworks, which were brought to life using tea and the process of isolation induced by the pandemic.

The artworks, through the portrayal of earthy tones, and lingering brushstrokes, evoke a sense of poetic calm, while a typewriter holding on to a welcome note reads, "When the pandemic hit, the artist was concerned about the availability of art materials. So, he decided to find ways to make art with readily available things around him, leaning in to using tea along with flower petals and fallen leaves from his garden."

The pieces on exhibit are intimate, poetic etchings of the artist, as if to note that he is having a cup of warm tea with the company of his own self.

"During the days that I spent in isolation, my studio overlooked a garden and I actually got a chance to admire the natural process, even amidst all the chaos. My relationships with people, my surroundings, the trees and cats around me are all my elements of inclusion," Chowdhury explained.

Starting from using tea as the vehicle of creation to playing with the structures of lotus and lunar

forms, a Yin-Yangesque duality of gendered energies, one can find faintly illuminated veins of bougainvillea petals and fallen leaves, making this particular rhythm of admiration palpable along the threads of Chowdhury's paintings, which work as intricate odes to nature itself.

The artworks at "Chaa Porbo", though strongly eluding a sense of Romantic revelation, are also interestingly politically charged. The political themes start from the use of the media itself, which is filled to its last sip with colonial legacy.

When one thinks of political postmodern art, the conversation often leads to deconstruction of delightfully whacky pieces, which brings kitsch and elegance within a single frame — an art form which exists to make a statement and one which often smugly steers clear from the foundations of aestheticism.

"Chaa Porbo", without doing this, fulfills the many tenets of postmodernism, with the artist being clad in a punjabi of an earthy tone.

"The myths and stories that I have come across in my life have synthesised in my subconscious being, and they come out in my work in the form of a certain style, I guess. It is all about the playful spirit," the artist concluded with a smile. "Chaa Porbo" will be open till April 8, from 3 pm to 9 pm.

The author is a postgrad student of English Literature and a freelance journalist. jahanaratariq@outlook.com.



PHOTO: SHANTO LAWRENCE COSTA