



Vicky Zahed

PHOTO: COURTESY

Inside the mind of Vicky Zahed

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Vicky Zahed started his career as a director with short films. Striving towards his passion, he soon rose to fame on television. He is known for redefining the thriller, supernatural, and suspense genres on screen. His Eid-ul-Azha television productions, “Chirokal Aaj”, “Punorjonmo”, “Ditiyo Shuchona”, “Prio Adnan” and “Kaykobad” were well-received by viewers. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, Vicky Zahed talks about what his process of directing looks like, and more.

When and how did you begin directing?

I always wanted to explore how it felt to be behind the camera. After my debut short film “Moments”, featuring Jovan in the lead role received a positive response, I started to explore short films more with my following projects, such as “Maya”, “Deyal”,



Afran Nisho and Mehazabien Chowdhury in ‘Chirokal Aaj’.

expectations of my viewers.

Your Eid tele-fiction “Chirokal Aaj” has been widely appreciated. Tell us about your experience of making it.

The success of “Chirokal Aaj” marks a milestone in my career. Many notable personalities from the entertainment fraternity have congratulated me for it, which was inspiring. Two scenes that I enjoyed while shooting for “Chirokal Aaj” were the proposal scene in the rain, and the scene where Rocky (played by Afran Nisho) keeps expressing his love for Tithi (played by Mehazabien Chowdhury) and she keeps forgetting it every few seconds. That scene left me in tears. Mehazabien Chowdhury was phenomenal in “Chirokal Aaj”.

Your Eid productions this year have mostly been psychological thrillers. Most of your tele-fictions end with unexpected twists that leave the audience in awe. How do you come up with such interesting endings?

Each time I plan a script, I start with a keyword. Then I start researching that word to broaden my knowledge of that particular topic or theme. Based on my knowledge, I start developing a storyline which leads to the creation of a full-fledged script. I always

prefer working with a particular team for any production as their unity makes the production process easy. Being a Hitchcock fan, I love crime and physiological thrillers, and most of my work is inspired by such themes. Speaking of the unexpected twists, I love to play with the audiences’ minds, and provide them with thrilling experiences.

Most of your releases this Eid feature Afran Nisho but in totally different roles. How was your experience of working with him?

My first tele-fiction featured Afran Nisho. Since then, he has always been a favourite. I feel that rather than acting, he absorbs the personalities of every character he plays. As a result, he always responds and reacts the way that his character naturally would in different scenarios. I feel proud to have successfully presented him in four different roles, and I believe he has aced them all. Above all, he is a very endearing and professional person. He is fun to be around.

What are your upcoming ventures?

This Eid has been rather tedious for me, as I had five productions. I am planning to take some time off yet again. However, I promise to come back soon with something worthwhile.



Mehazabien Chowdhury in ‘Punorjonmo’.

“Durbeen”, and “Aaj Amar Pala”. I ventured out to television with the production, “The Life of Jilil”, featuring Afran Nisho and Safa Kabir, in 2019. After “Rehnuma” in 2020, I took a break due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, like every dawn is followed by a bright sunny day, my time off led to the creation of many successful ventures such as “Irina”, the “Jonmo” series, and “Majnu”. This Eid, my telefilms earned a lot of appreciation, which has only doubled my dedication, and the

FEROZA BEGUM

immortalised through dedicated website by ACI Foundation



A snippet from the website.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Feroza Begum was a once in a generation artiste, having devoted her life to promote and teach Nazrul Sangeet, as well as becoming one of the most well-known exponents of the craft in South East Asia.

To mark the legend’s 91st Birth Anniversary on July 28, ACI Foundation recently took the initiative to launch the “Feroza Begum Archive”, a website dedicated to her, highlighting her legacy for generations to come.

By logging in to www.ferozabegum.com, one can access a wealth of music, videos, albums and verified information, among much more, in the finely curated site.

Bilingual biographies, as well as the awards that Feroza Begum has received during her lifetime, are also present in a neatly managed tab, including rare pictures barely seen before by the public.

Full volumes of songs, including valuable staff notations, can be found, as well as hand-written letters by the legend herself.

The opening ceremony on July 28, which was hosted by renowned Nazrul Sangeet exponent Sadya Afreen Mallick, was heartfelt and emotional. ACI Chairman and brother of Feroza Begum, M Anis Ud Dowla and disciple and niece Shusmita Anis, could not be present due to the loss of a family member.

Shusmita Anis had worked incredibly hard to make the three-year project a reality, earning praise from all the guests in the ceremony.

The Chief Guest of the programme, Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Honourable Speaker of Parliament, had emphasised on the importance of such website, as did former cultural minister and eminent actor, Asaduzzaman Noor. Renowned names from both Bengals, including Ferdousi Rahman, Mustafa Monwar, Shafin Ahmed, Srikanta Acharya, M Asafuddowla, Matiur Rahman, Haimanti Sukla, Arati Mukherji and Anup Ghoshal also paid their tributes during the programme.



From the opening ceremony on July 28.

RAMENDU MAJUMDAR

Milestones mere alibi for this remarkable man

ANSHUMAN BHOWMICK

“I was born two days after the passing away of Rabindranath Tagore. That was the 24th day of Sravan in the year 1348 of Bengali calendar, or 9th August, 1941, in Christian calendar,” reads the first two lines of Ramendu Majumdar’s autobiography, the English translation of which is slated for release this month. As the man turns eighty this year, his family and friends across generations and nations have reasons to feel elated. Not just because eighty is a milestone, but also because Ramendu Majumdar is special for all of them, in distinguished ways.

Ramendu *Da*, or simply *Dada*, as the whole of Bangladesh loves referring to him, would wake up this morning a contented man, perhaps listening to a Dwijendra Lal Roy composition sung by Luva Nahid Choudhury and sip his favourite cup of coffee. Contentment comes naturally to him. With that, comes a general sense of warmth and generosity – both his second name. One feels like using two other expressions, made immortal since Mathew Arnold used them together, ‘sweetness and light’ about Ramendu *Da*. We rarely come across a thoroughbred gentleman whose appearance at one end of the corridor or at a lecture podium makes one feel comfortable. He is not known for raising his voice. He is always seen smiling, a cordial gesture that transforms the colour of every assembly he attends. Add to this frame his ever-supportive wife Ferdousi Majumdar, a legendary actor in her own right, and what you receive is a pristine gift of positivity – a cure for every malady in these trying times. Conjugal bliss is not something we Bengalis are used to flaunting.

However, the Majumdars, together ever since their eyes met at the University of Dhaka, wear happiness so effortlessly that one craves for more. Seeing them together –

never reminded of their different religious identities – is among the most alluring romantic escapes in a time fast grappling with the ferocious intensity of communal politics.

Born and raised in a family of legal professionals at Lakshmipur in Noakhali, Ramendu *Da* has seen the best of times and the worst of times, at least twice over. He has witnessed the Bengal Partition, the trauma of which never really left him. He has felt the repercussions of Noakhali riots. And of course, he has seen the emergence of Bangladesh from the clutches of cultural and military oppression. Having made his name in the advertising industry and nurtured a leading advertising agency, Ramendu *Da* has maintained a vigorous public life. A life dedicated – generally speaking – to the cause of Bengali culture, and Bangladesh’s theatre. I believe this singles him out among many others.

The epithet, ‘Sanskritik Byaktiktwa’, or loosely translated as a man of culture, sits so pretty on him that he does not require a hat at all. Yet, there are many feathers adorning this invisible hat. He has been a popular news reader to a generation glued to the BTV screen. In recent decades, he has carved a niche as a talk-show host. Last heard, he featured in a significant Bengali feature film awaiting a commercial release. Given his unmistakable presence in Bangladesh’s public life, a status that only kept sky-rocketing over the years, irrespective of the regimes, Ramendu *Da* always looks poised for positions of power, but he never hankers for any. His age-old friends at the Dhaka Club and trusted aides in the vicinity of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy would correct me if I go wrong at this, but I have always seen authority hanging loosely about him, and this has nothing to do with power. He is someone who never boasts about his achievements as an art administrator, and loves underplaying his stellar role in

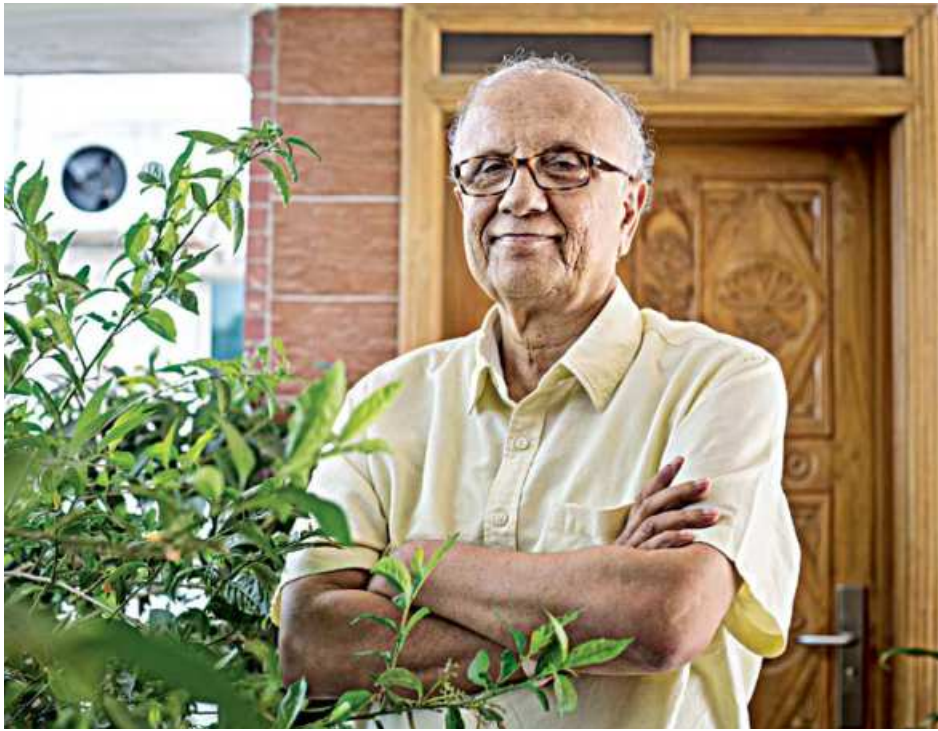


PHOTO: STAR

shaping post-1971 Bangladeshi theatre, and projecting it internationally.

Yet, the world outside Bangladesh, my city Kolkata including, knows him as the face of Bangladeshi theatre. An avid reader, he loves coming to Kolkata at regular intervals, with the Book Fair being the major attraction. Whenever he arrives in Kolkata and settles himself in a Hindustan Park guest house that happened to be the residence of Jyoti Basu, the legendary Communist leader and a former Chief Minister of West Bengal, people from several generations come to visit him not to ask for any particular favour but simply for the joy of interacting with the man equally comfortable in a chequered *lungi* and beige trousers. When he visits the Academy of

Fine Arts auditorium to experience a play, a general sense of reverence is palpable in the air. From octogenarians like Rudraprasad Sengupta, Bibhash Chakraborty, and Manoj Mitra, to their juniors like Bimal Chakraborty and Goutam Halder, everyone loves sharing a word with him. Many of his age love reminiscing about the past, but Ramendu *Da* is very much a today’s man, appreciating every expression of brilliance in contemporary theatre.

This is reflected in the pages of *Theatre*, a magazine he has been editing and publishing for the last five decades, a magazine that has recorded every possible register of Bangladeshi theatre as it moved ahead in time, securing a distinguished place among the nations producing plays

while remaining rooted to her indigenous performance forms. His Kolkata visits entail, quite invariably, freshly printed and bound copies of *Theatre*, made available freely to anyone interested in Bangladeshi theatre. For many of us, Ramendu *Da* is Bangladeshi theatre itself.

This identity has been carried forward to distant shores. Ever since he joined the International Theatre Institute (ITI) and played the pivotal part in setting up the Bangladesh centre of ITI, his passion knew no bounds. This centre, ably supported and lapped up by his contemporaries, has given Bangladeshi theatre an international exposure, hitherto restricted to the National School of Drama, New Delhi. It is remarkable that within a decade he, along with his friend Mofidul Hoque, started editing the prestigious *World of Theatre* volume, and he went on to become the President of ITI, a status almost exclusively preserved by European nations and cash-rich economies till that point. He held the chair for two terms, and continues to hold the President Worldwide position – a recognition that looks tailor-made for him.

Having seen him chairing a few ITI sessions in the recent past, I have reached an estimate of this man. He hogs the limelight without realising it, and never gets weary of it. He manages any crisis – often involving supremely sensitive cultural issues with diplomatic repercussions – like a self-assured referee of a football match. Thereby, one gets the ultimate Ramendu Majumdar, a referee with one foot rooted in the Lakshmipur High School grounds, and the other in any playing turf across the globe. With a whistle that hardly blows, for his authority is omnipresent, irrespective of his power.

The author is a member of the executive board in Traditional Performing Arts Forum, International Theatre Institute.