



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

'Imaginary of the Common: 50 years of Sultan's Oeuvre' underway at Bengal Shilpalay

MORMEE MAHTAB

Commemorating revered artist Sheikh Mohammed Sultan's legacy, Bengal Shilpalay has organised the exhibition, "Imaginary of the Common: 50 years of Sultan's Oeuvre". The exhibition, which began on September 10, features a wide variety of works, starting from the maestro's earliest charcoal drawings to his most famous paintings on watercolour and oil.

Sheikh Mohammed Sultan, fondly known as 'Laal Miah', was one of the most influential pioneers of modern art in Bangladesh. The visionary artist usually chose the peasants



of the country as his muse. He was for the symbolical portrayal of their indomitable spirit and inner strength through his larger-than-life images of their muscular figures.

Sultan was an avant-garde artist, whose work revolved around socio-economic parity, focusing on the Liberation War of Bangladesh, genocide, land grabbing, and migration that took place against the vast agricultural setting around him.

The exhibition also contains photographs

and memorabilia, including films, interviews and installations that shed light on Sultan's process of art making and his love for the common people. Some works by Sultan are being publically displayed for the first time, at the event.

Sultan was influenced by western techniques and forms, particularly the impressionism movement. This influence was evident in his works about his travels to Shimla, Lahore, Karachi and parts of Europe. In his later paintings, he shifted his focus to figures against the rural backdrop, creating a unique contrast between the themes of life and death, migration, and land grabbing.

Sultan's work weaved a fine connection between universality and local possibilities, which was apparent in his transformation of traditional forms, through a revival of the Renaissance reflected in his exaggerated figures of men and women in his paintings. This quality was also apparent in his use of natural colours on raw jute or brown

coloured wrapping paper, which he discussed in Tareque Masud's documentary film, "Adam Surat: The Inner Strength".

The film, where Sultan wanted to remain merely as a catalyst rather than having the focus on himself, portrays his life in light of his surroundings where he recounts the tale of Bangladeshi peasants.

The whimsical, reclusive personality and Bohemian lifestyle of Sultan is on display at the exhibition as captured by renowned photographer Nasir Ali Mamun, who spent ten years in the pursuit of exploring the inner spirituality of the artist.

With Sultan's paintings and sketches, as well as literary pieces on his life and work by various contemporary writers of different times, the exhibition offers an inner passage into the mind of the great artist.

The exhibition will be open for spectators till December 4, 2021 from 3 pm to 8 pm at the Quamrul Hasan Exhibition Hall of Bengal Shilpalay (except Sundays). Visitors must follow all Covid-19 safety guidelines.

OTT platforms are a blessing for our entertainment industry: Afran Nisho

SHAH ALAM SHAZI

Afran Nisho is one of the most celebrated names in the showbiz industry. The multi-talented actor has become popular among the audiences over the years, for his accurate portrayal of diverse characters on the television screen. Recently, the "Chirokal Aaj" actor has also become prominent in the world of OTT, with his breakthrough performances.

In a candid interview with The Daily Star, the versatile actor opened up about his journey as an artiste and how he believes that OTT can be the next big platform for the entertainment industry.

Some people want to be stars, while others want to be known as artistes. What do you truly want to become?

That's a good question. Earlier on acting was only my passion, but now it has turned into my profession. Acting is what I do to earn my livelihood and that is something that I want to pursue further.

As I chose this path of acting, I used to ask myself in the beginning of my career whether I wanted to be a hero, a star or simply just an artiste. And in that moment I immediately knew that I wanted to be an artiste by heart. I am in love with acting and that's something that has been fervor till date. Now its upto the audience how much they truly appreciate my acting.

You started your career as a model, and then shifted to acting. Within last few years you were able to enact a range of diverse characters. How were you able to do so?

There is a major misconception that models cannot act. As I had no experience in theatre, I felt like I have faced a major setback in my acting career already.

The turning point in my career came when I got to meet the legendary actor and my idol, Humayun Faridee, and interact with him on a personal level. He was the first person to observe that I was not expressive at all!

One day he gave me an advice that totally changed me as an actor.

He told me to observe anything and everything that went on around me. Since

then, I started to address him as my "acting institute". His words gave me the inspiration to work hard and get into the skin of the character by observing the part thoroughly. Through my persistence and determination, I was finally dive deep into my roles.

With the current surge of streaming platforms in Bangladesh, what do you think about OTT's future?

OTT platforms are opening new opportunities for the production of big budget projects and films. I will say that it is a blessing for our industry. And I am hopeful that it will revolutionise the showbiz industry for good by showcasing quality productions.

Directors consistently try to cast hit pairings together in television, to generate more views. Your pairing with Mehazabeen is one such pairing that is popular in tele-fictions. What is your take on the idea of portraying popular pairs together for work?

Pairing is a crucial part planning any project. If you are a good actor, but your co-artist is not able to deliver the dialogues properly, then you will not be able to engage the audience as much. If you have a good understanding and co-ordination as a reel life pair, then the acceptance of your performance doubles up among the audiences.

Notable pairs such as Afzal-Subarna, Razzak and Kabori, Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol have left an indomitable presence into the mind of the viewers. People remember them for their spellbinding chemistry. The art of pairing is something that's very sweet and special and through it, one is able to create unforgettable memories for the audiences.

Many have speculated that the television viewership has declined drastically. What are your views about it?

While it is true that most of the people are turning away from television, one cannot outright claim that we do not have television viewers all together. There are many who are still eager to watch quality content on television. We still have a good number of viewers who watch our projects on TV.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Keeping hope alive through storytelling: Why 'The Breadwinner' is a timely watch

NAHALY NAFISA KHAN

In the past few weeks, we saw our feeds being flooded with posts and messages from Afghanistan as the Taliban once again took over the country. They were messages filled with feelings of looming fear, uncertainty and helplessness, so much so that these feelings hovered around us with a certain sense of unease as well, even though we are miles away from the occurring.

War is always the hardest on women and children. Setting all the geopolitical discussions aside, it is not brand new information that the Taliban rule proved to be the worst for the women of Afghanistan in particular. "The Breadwinner" (2017) is a timely watch to comprehend the horrors that Afghan women are now anticipating with each passing moment. Based on a novel by Deborah Ellis, this one and a half-hour long animated feature film from Irish animation studio Cartoon Saloon is written by Anita Doron in collaboration with Aman Mojadidi, and directed by Nora Twomey.

The story circles around a young Afghan girl named Parvana, who is compelled to take the identity of a boy to sustain her family consisting of her mother, an elder sister and a little brother after her father is wrongfully arrested by the Taliban. In the



process, she rekindles her friendship with Shauzia, an old school friend who too, takes up the identity of a boy to sustain herself and her family.

Parvana not only has to play the role of the sole breadwinner of the family after her father's arrest, but also takes up the role to keep the feeble spark of hope burning in the household with her stories, just like her father used to. Her father, Nurullah Alizai, a school teacher who lost a leg in the Soviet-Afghan War, is seen to be teaching his daughter history with his spontaneous way of storytelling, before getting arrested by the Taliban. He describes the history and heritage of the Afghans with his vibrant stories, visualised even more beautifully with the animation. This is the role that Parvana has to play for her little brother Zaki, as well as her mother and her sister. One particular frame that stayed with

me long after I finished watching the film is when Nurullah describes how the country landed itself where it is now, with the Taliban taking the autonomy away from Afghan women in the name of the Sharia law and imposing the veil on those who would otherwise be unwilling to wear one.

In the particular frame that I'm talking about, Nurullah's narrations are accompanied by a visual of a woman behind closed doors and a veil, where the veil is made to look like the bars of a jail gate. This single frame, with its visual appeal, was able to render the message clearer than ever. Women were not being protected under the Taliban rule, they were being caged.

Apart from the visuals, the writing of the film stands out as well. The most well-written character in the film, according to me, is that of Razaq – an individual

with strongholds among the Taliban who forms a peculiar friendship with Parvana, dressed as Aatish, in the face of grief of losing a loved one. This grief that binds the two together also brings out the more humane side of Razaq, who eventually helps Parvana to rescue her father, risking his own life.

Even after knowing Parvana's whole truth, Razaq doesn't punish her with the authority that he holds, rather he deals with it through empathy. That is one brilliant and beautiful example of character development in the face of adversity.

Storytelling becomes a coping mechanism for Parvana, which is evident in how, when Parvana and Shauzia are faced with a crisis, Parvana once again takes solace in storytelling in her process of trying to comfort Shauzia, or perhaps herself.

Shauzia, however, takes a different approach with it altogether. While Parvana's story, as mythical as it is, contains the grim realities of the life they were living, Shauzia, with the spirit of a dreamer, tends to turn every element of the story into a light and heartwarming one.

Parvana even conquers the most gut-wrenching challenge of rescuing her father amidst a looming threat of war and uncertainty with the power of a story, and in the process comes to terms with a long-suppressed trauma of losing her elder brother Sulayman to the war.

With all the brilliant portrayals of suffering, grief and trauma, I think this is the very reason that the film stands out. It is a timely watch not because of its contextual relevance, but because it generates hope, and talks about real courage, all of it through the power of a single story taking different turns. It reminds us how powerful storytelling can be, and no matter how difficult it gets to carry on, one can always come through by keeping hope and courage



Stills from the film.

alive. "The Breadwinner" is available to stream on Netflix.

The author is a sub-editor at Toggle, The Daily Star.