

Celebrating 700 years of Dante

The Embassy of Italy, in collaboration with Dhaka University's Institute of Modern Languages, held a workshop on Dante on 21 October, on campus. The event was part of the Week of the Italian Language in the World, held every year to celebrate the language internationally. This year, the theme was the great poet Dante Alighieri — with concerts, dramatic readings, etc. undertaken across the globe.



You know or at least have heard of Dante. It is almost impossible not to! Well, you may not have read his works, but it is inevitable that you have at least come across the Divine Comedy. And even if you do not know the man at all or are unfamiliar with his literature, you have surely seen an artwork which was inspired by him.

Many legendary artists, from Sandro Botticelli to William Blake to Salvador Dali, had borrowed inspiration from him. If not anything else, doesn't Dan Brown's novel *Inferno* ring a bell?

Such is the influence of the Italian poet that he remains ubiquitous even centuries after his demise in 1321.

And hence, marking 700 years of Dante's death, this year, the Week of the Italian

Language in the World commemorated his life and works that continue to influence generations after generations.

"Dante is a national icon for us. He is considered to be the Father of the Italian language," said Enrico Nunziata, Italian ambassador to Bangladesh. "He is highly revered as the poet and philosopher who contributed to solidifying the national identity and unity. The Divine Comedy is also part of the syllabus in educational institutions in Italy."

Dante's Divine Comedy is one of the finest works of literature ever produced in the world. The long epic poem, which describes a journey of a soul in the afterlife, deals with a wide plethora of genres and subjects; it is a commentary on politics, it deals with matters

of morality and spirituality, and it is a love story too.

Read it if you haven't already! Although Dante may feel daunting at times, requiring an understanding of his allegories and the politics of his era, he grows on you. It will be worthwhile. You can also try out audiobooks and podcasts, such as "From the Dark Wood to Paradise," as recommended during the workshop.

The ambassador said that the purpose of the workshop was to spark interest among the youth to read the works by this poet.

Along with the ambassador, the workshop was attended by Dr Md Akhtaruzzaman, vice-chancellor of University of Dhaka, Dr A B M Razaul Karim Faqure, director of DU's Institute of Modern Languages, and Thomas Baumgartner, political attaché of the Embassy of Switzerland. Dr Stefania Chiapello, an academic who has explored Dante with her research work, spoke at the workshop.

The workshop also introduced to the participants a virtual tour of the exhibition, Dante Plus 700. On the online platform, you could move about much like the way you would when using Google Street View for example, and see the overall exhibits and click on them to explore further.

The exhibition brought together a diverse group of artists, featuring paintings, sculptures et al — portrayals of Dante in various themes and ideas. To exemplify, some would remind you of cartoons and comic books and yet a few others had quirkily put him in today's modern settings, like the one where he is shown with a laptop, or the one where he dons a spacesuit!

A man who lived centuries ago and was exiled from Florence, had transcended times and borders, continuing to be relevant in this day and age, never failing to capture the imagination of the contemporary. Dante is timeless. The exhibition and overall this year's Week of the Italian Language in the World, are testaments to that.

By M H Haider

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ঠিক যেমন রূপচর্চায় আভিজাত্য মানেই

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