



## Dawn of a new Baishakh

Pahela Baishakh is back, so is the promise of a new year that it never fails to bring. After a two-year gap forced by the pandemic precautions, we are once again set to celebrate this very Bengali festival with all the fervour and gaiety it demands.

The quintessential celebrations will once more begin at day break under the shade of the grand ashwatha tree (sacred fig, reminiscent of the Banyan) at the Ramna Park. Songs of Tagore, Nazrul and other poets will play too, chorused in united voices, making some of us nostalgic, and creating fresh memories for the young ones, to cherish later in their lives. The young and dynamic students of Charukala have been busy painting colourful murals on walls and paper, as well as laboriously creating giant sculptures and masks, reflecting Bengali heritage. Today, those were paraded around during the joyous Mangal Shobhajatra, on the streets around Dhaka University, once more. The unnamed baul will be singing at the roadside now, with admirers gathered around, listening to the tunes of rustic and rural Bengal!

Baishakh has always been

about human resilience. The Baishakhi sun seems unbearable yet we never fail to find an array of positivity in it. As Tagore puts it, "muchhey jak glani, ghuchey jak jora; ogni-saney shuchi hok dhora (let the weary be erased, infirmity cease; hallowed be the Earth to bathe in your fire). After two tough years fighting a pandemic, our emotions could not have been more aligned with Tagore than this!

For what at times seemed a never-ending ordeal, the entire duration of the COVID-19 pandemic not only curbed our celebrations and stifled our spirits, it also stomped on the business created by festivals— all peak times for local businesses to flourish. It also pushed us into our own metaphorical boxes, isolating us from each other. With the pandemic easing up across the globe, we can finally start to re-live our lives freely.

With the new day and the new year, let us again hope that joy and stability return to our lives, the new and old normal arrive at a balance, and life gets back on track.

Subho Nababarsha!

**MAHFUZ ANAM**



Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed  
Model: Simmi  
Wardrobe: Kumudini  
Makeup: Sumon Rahat  
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#PERSPECTIVE

# What's the "Dhaka" magic?

There is no doubt that in terms of the public conscious of Bangladesh, being the capital of the country for 50 years, and the administrative headquarters of the region for much longer, Dhaka has expanded from a quaint green eastern sleepy town to a raging metropolis. It appears to thrive on chaos, energy and heat pulsating through its crowds, heavy traffic, and bustling markets.

Which is why when the pandemic-curbing lockdowns gripped Dhaka, its residents saw the city in a whole new light. The usually loud city became unnervingly quiet, the roads empty of people and vehicles, and even street-side vendors. Stray cats and dogs skulked about, emaciated and desperate, as food leftovers from the city's innumerable eateries disappeared due to them being shuttered.

Scenes like this are usually only seen during the annual Eid holidays, when people en masse leave for their hometowns, but then the air holds within it the essence of festivity, unlike the lockdowns, when things looked bleak and menacingly quiet. This unwanted calm snatched away livelihoods just as the pandemic snatched lives.

But as COVID strains become less threatening, and people adapt back to normal lives gradually, the beloved chaos of Dhaka is back. More often than not, its residents will feel the brunt of and vocally bemoan the pollution, road congestion, clogged drains and the seasonal water-logging — and all that which truthfully plagues this mammoth city. And yet, a large number of the same people will also miss this loud and noisy monster when they are away from it.

So, what is it about Dhaka that makes it so beloved to its residents?

truly just understand, let alone explore, this cantankerous behemoth of a town.

Each *moholla* has its own flavour, seeped in very local flavours, where the people know each other for generations, sharing the tribulations and joys of lives lived together, sometimes in friendship and sometimes in animosity, but never in apathy or

area and the new. There are also parks, artisanal shops, painters, metal works, cloth-dyeing establishments, novelty tea sellers. Any random day while out on an errand, one might find an erstwhile unobserved structure or spot, sitting there like it always has been, waiting for someone new to discover it anew.



more formal establishments like Chinese, Mexican, Korean, Indian, Turkish and Sri Lankan, to name a few.

The ubiquitous nature of roadside tea stalls with strong thick tea and an assortment of dry snacks like toasts, buns and of course the bananas, is a much loved characteristic of Dhaka.

## Dhaka, of plenty

Once upon a time, people could claim that a lot of comfort items are not easily available in Dhaka, and even less in the rest of the country. But as incomes increase and tastes change, the city and its population have evolved to accommodate all sorts of tastes and preferences, in housing, clothes, food, furniture, décor, etc. If you see something online, a replica or inspired product will be in the Dhaka shops soon enough. From original brand shops to first copies and bona fide local producers, items of all types and qualities are available in the city, for people of all budgets.

## The literary scene

Dhaka is home to the country's largest book fair—Ekushey Boi Mela, in February every year. The narrow labyrinthine lanes of Nilkhet, Bangla Bazar and Mirpur book hubs are magical for bookworms for both new and second-hand Bangla or English books. Many a rare gem can be spotted by scouring the hundreds of small and ordinary-looking stalls in the city's book markets. Not only that, a new culture of book cafes has emerged, to the delight of all bookworms that call Dhaka home.

## DU

The city and its eponymous university are part and emblematic of each other. Both are vast, welcoming of strangers, and a hotbed of activities, nurturing life. Not to mention, both the city and university have been home to and played key roles in all national and political movements that have made today's Bangladesh the way it is, with all its good, as well its bad. The city was, and largely remains, the seat of Bangladeshi intelligentsia. Whether that is good, or overall detrimental for the country, is a debate for another day.

Here is to our Stockholm Syndrome-ish love for Dhaka, with all its wonders and pains, and a host of human stories at every step.

By Sania Aiman

Photo: LS Archive/ Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Photo: Azim Khan Ronnie



## The one with open arms

Dhaka is mysterious in its vastness, all-engulfing. There are so many areas and corners and nooks and gullies, that a few lifetimes might not be enough for one to

unfamiliarity.

Contrastingly, there are large buildings where neighbours do not know the faces of each other, or names or occupations, or share their pains and happiness. The very same neighbours, in both types of localities and the variations therein, will however seem to band together with belongingness when faced against something as a community. It is a strange dichotomy which is Dhaka's truth.

It is estimated that every day, more than 40,000 people migrate to Dhaka on average, and as experience will testify, scores also leave, unable to cope with the rough and cruel city that this can be. Yet, the city welcomes with open arms all those dreamers with a will to do hard work and be resilient.

## The secret keeper

The city's maze-like map is misleading of the secrets it holds so closely. The crazy network of bland squiggly lines here on the street level hold beautiful old houses, chic modern structures, various little stores and food shops tucked in countless corners of the alleys of this city, both the Old Town

## A foodie's haven

The one thing that people leaving Dhaka miss, and those living here enjoy, is the scrumptious variety of food. From the obvious Old Dhaka's *kachchi buriyani* and its potato, *nihari paye*, naan, grills and broasts, *pista badam* drinks to the variety of *bhorta bhajis* of the Bangladeshi cuisine, there is vibrant sub culture of snacks thriving in Dhaka.

Traditional snacks include *bakarkhanis* and *puris*, *pakoras* and *aloo chops*, *daal boras*, *chanachur*, *fuchka*, *chotpoti*, *muri makha*, *boot bhaja*, and what not. Recent access to the Internet has sparked the creativity of food sellers further, most evident in the new variety of street food that has appeared on the scene.

One might think of the strawberry *bhorta*, *aporajita cha*, spiced boiled egg served over steaming noodles, versions of chicken soup, dim (egg) cake, crepes and rolls to be a mostly inclusive list, but it barely mentions the most obvious in just street food. Not to mention the array of cuisines available in the





## Satyajit, Madhabi and Tagore: the masters craft Charulata

*"Did you read Noshto-neer?"  
 Satyajit Ray asked over the  
 phone. "I am sending it to you.  
 Read it."*

*"Yes, I read it already," Madhabi  
 Mukherjee, the actress, replied.*

*"Still, read it again," the director  
 insisted.*

And the rest is history. The movie  
 Charulata — adapted from Rabindranath  
 Tagore's 1901 novella Noshto-neer —  
 came into being in 1964, where Madhabi  
 brought to life the central character of  
 the story, Charulata.

**Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed**

**Model: Simmi**

**Wardrobe: Kumudini**

**Makeup: Sumon Rahat**

**Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha**

**Special thanks to Nazneen Haque  
 Mimi**



**EID / 22**





#LITERATURE

# SATYAJIT RAY, TAGORE AND THE TIMELESS CHARULATA

## 5 reasons why you should watch this film



Tagore stories in films) to present Madhabi Mukherjee with elegance.

The film oozes grace in Charulata and her surroundings, from the ornate decor of the mansion to the styling of Charulata herself. The beautiful saris would inspire the modern woman to drape the Bengali garb in style, the blouses rediscovered and added to the wardrobe, the teep to be worn with pride.

But beyond all these reasons, watch Charulata for pure entertainment. After all, isn't that what a film should be about?

Charulata obviously does not fail in that. With dazzling performances and extraordinary brilliance of Satyajit Ray coupled with that of Rabindranath Tagore, Charulata is a classic not to be missed, especially for Bengalis!

By M H Haider

Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Model: Simmi

Wardrobe: Kumudini

Makeup: Sumon Rahat

Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha

Special thanks to Nazneen Haque Mimi



A generation or two has passed since its release. Here's why we, as the current generation, ought to go back to this classic.

**1. It is an avant-garde masterpiece of Bengali cinema**  
The movie bagged many accolades, including Silver Bear for best direction at the Berlin Film Festival. Even Satyajit Ray himself has been said to say that this was his favourite among all the movies he had made.

That should be reason enough to watch the film! It's arguably Ray's finest work. Plus, it's a Tagore story. Now that's what we call synergy! Both men were polymaths, Bengali maestros who stood taller than the rest (metaphorically as well as physically, in terms of height too).

The Ray-Tagore connection goes much deeper. Satyajit Ray had met the poet in his childhood, for an autograph, and got not just his signature but a poem inscribed as well. Many years later, Ray, who grew up to become an iconic figure in his own right, made a documentary film on Rabindranath, as well as presenting a number of his stories on screen.

One such story is of Charulata, a lonely housewife's tale set in a late nineteenth century affluent household.

She loiters about from room to room. Sometimes, she picks up a book, sometimes she hums on her own. She takes out her opera glasses from a drawer and looks at the outside world with curiosity. But, she is alone.

Ray establishes the character of a lonely housewife in the very beginning of the film, portraying the gracious-looking Charulata amidst the setting of the opulent house she lives in.

She is a bird in a golden cage, spending her days in the confines of her affluent husband's mansion. She reads a lot, and has a latent knack for writing. She has no scarcity of material possessions, but the attention of her husband remains unattainable.

And then, Amol, his cousin, storms in that household one day, quite literally: during an iconic

The film oozes grace in Charulata and her surroundings, from the ornate decor of the mansion to the styling of Charulata herself. The beautiful saris would inspire the modern woman to drape the Bengali garb in style, the blouses rediscovered and added in the wardrobe, the teep to be worn with pride.

storm, a *kaal-baishakhi*, if you may. Soon enough, a relationship blossoms between Charu and Amol — the plot of the film.

**2. It features a central female character**

The movie is largely seen through the eyes of Charulata, the protagonist. There are not many movies, even today — compared to the ones with male protagonists — in which we see the world from a woman's perspective. In that sense, even though Charulata is an old film, it is indeed refreshing!

**3. It celebrates Tagore tunes**

The movie features Rabindra sangeet in its sweetest.

The playful 'Phule Phule Dho'ley Dho'ley' with Charu on a swing in a garden is bound to uplift the mood of any Tagore-loving Bengali fan. And then there is the melodious 'Ami Chini Go Chini Tomare!' The film pays tribute to Rabindranath the bard in the most charming way.

**4. It gives glimpses of Bengal of a bygone era**

Charulata's husband Bhupati runs *The Sentinel*, a political newspaper that does not shy away from attacking the government of the time. The backdrop? Bengal under the British Raj.

Bhupati is a kind gentleman, an intellectual with a fiery passion for politics, a Bengali with huge reverence for Raja Ram Mohan Roy — as hinted during a small party.

Be it the *jolsha*-type party itself, or the palanquin Charu observes with her opera glasses, and in fact the overall movie set with all the furniture and objects used, we get tiny glimpses of the politics and society of a long lost time.

**5. Charulata is elegance personified**

One can't help falling in love with the Bengali belle that is Charu. Any Tagore fan knows how splendidly he had portrayed the heroines in his novels, and Satyajit Ray seemed to take a page out of his books (well quite literally too, in the sense that he adapted

SPECIAL

PAHELA  
BAISHAKH

The Daily Star

DHAKA THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 2022 BAISHAKH 1, 1429 BS





#FASHION

# THE SAGA OF RICKSHAW ART and its entry into fashion

'Bhepu, Thamun, Bajan' a common catchphrase in pedicabs or rickshaws of the eighties, is now doing its fashion rounds on tee shirts.

The magic of this avant-garde people's art or commonly called 'rickshaw art' has seeped into the folds of an increasingly cosmopolitan Dhaka. Fashion accessories, clothing, household additions, just name it, and the bright neon colours of rickshaw art are flashing glory in all forms.

Rickshaw art covers the whole rickshaw decoration from painted backboards and side panels, appliqué hoods, the brass vases stuffed with plastic or paper flowers, the painted rectangular metal board at the backside; the tri-cycle boasts of bright splashes of colours, allowing the artist to paint their dreams with flamboyance.

They say Dhaka is the city of magic, where streets are crammed with an unofficial number of 400,000 rickshaws; so picking from their brushes and the painting the town, as well as our lives, in neon red or pink is only a very expected outcome. There have been many serious discussions on this kitsch art form and needless to say these paintings of movie stars in garish pink, electric blues and neon greens have also piqued our brains and art senses.

The artist has used his wildest imagination and multiplied them into larger than life vision; a movie star of his dreams, he drew with all his love and used the colours of his imagination to amplify her on his canvas; a serene village scene, his favourite mosque, his favourite movie posters all get his equal attention.

A little inspection into these primitive people carriers, with their

splurge of floral decorative seat covers and ornamental plastic strings in the shapes of quirky celestial bodies appliquéd onto the hood — you will get to see a world of baroque and extravagant designs. But when put together it gives out a bird's eye view into Bangladesh's pop culture and most importantly depicts the artist's own beliefs, expressions and aesthetics.

"It is a very expressive medium of art, where the expressions of the masses can be experienced," said Kuhu Plamondon, a reputed Bangladeshi fashion designer, who plans on reviving the once almost-vanishing art form into her medium of fashion.

Rickshaws first came to Bangladesh in the 1940s, which were then primarily undecorated functional vehicles. After the Liberation War, it became the norm to have pictures of war and freedom, portrayed on the shields at the back of the rickshaws. Then fast forward to the 80s and 90s, the illustrations involved more showbiz viewpoints like the portraits of movies stars, illustrations of landscapes, and even social messages that were both meaningful and eye-catching at the same time.

Today, the art form has a more religious aesthetic, but more importantly is getting subdued by the emergence of digital prints, a cheaper alternative to the original hand-painted versions.

"I still remember my Art College days," post-

independence, these rickshaws brought colour to the otherwise mundane streets of Dhaka. The more attractive a rickshaw was, greater its chance of being hired. Rickshaw art is an inherent part of our culture, I personally consider it as "*people's art*," serving as a medium of expression to the artists' feelings towards humanity, entertainment, and even devotion, we simply cannot lose it or remove it from mainstream pop culture," says Plamondon.

And as an experimental attempt to stop the popular art from fading, Kuhu Plamondon has collaborated with famed designer Chandana Dewan to revive the sensibility of the art on a different canvas. Everyday comfortable wear like tee-shirts, jeans, bags and umbrellas are



struggle for survival, and maybe sometime in the future we will no longer be swept up by a swirl of garish colours and loud stories of expressions, which have for so long kept our streets bustling and alive.

The admission of rickshaw art into fashion is a commendable way to keep alive this unique genre of art. Wear these tees and flaunt your colours.

**By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury**  
**Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed**  
**Model: Tarin**  
**Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha**  
**Makeup: Sumon Rahat**  
**Wardrobe: Kuhu Plamondon & Chandana Dewan**

*Essentials: The Rickshaw art collection by Kuhu Plamondon and Chandana Dewan are available at Chondon's*



being bedecked with the slogans and catch phrases or even faces of movie stars of rickshaw art. With this, they hope to encourage the current generation towards appreciating the art form and the efforts of the original craftsmen, the rickshaw artists.

Md Dewan Miah, a rickshaw artist of the capital, was quite sceptical about the future of the business. According to the astute painter, fleets of rickshaws were now bought by businessmen instead of the rickshaw pullers, and hence the former contacted the artists directly for any painting order. According to Dewan, these men opted for a more economical version. "They want digital prints because it is easier to print, takes much less time to apply and is more cost effective," reflected the artist.

And hence we understand that the days of these old-fashioned art may be numbered, and their ingenious artists may disappear with time. Today, the art form and the artists are both suffering through a







#ART

# RICKSHAW PAINTING

## a dying art form?

Not many things scream quintessentially Bangladeshi as does rickshaw art. Seeing the vibrant colours, picturesque designs, and catchy motifs created by expert hands from afar and in anywhere in the world, one will instantly know it is a representation of Bangladesh. But, is this unique form of art that we proudly call our own on the verge of fading out?

The advent of rickshaw in Dhaka dates back to the colonial period. As a new mode of commute was introduced, it quickly gained popularity, and so did the artform it brought along. Utmost care was taken to decorate a rickshaw with meticulously hand painted murals that took days to complete – a true labour of love.

Within a few years, the city was buzzing with rickshaw painting workshops and the artform was living its glory days. However now, the scene has become dull, as original rickshaw art is rapidly being replaced with digital printing, which is comparatively less time consuming, as well as cheaper.

In fact, there are very few authentic rickshaw artists remaining now, who receive very little opportunity to work and are nearing their retirement. The bigger problem lies in the fact that their following generation is barely carrying on this heritage as a legacy.

In an attempt to continue this art form along with many others via modern means, Dacca, a clothing label, offers contemporary street wear injected with the heritage and tradition of Bangladesh. Founded by three friends in 2019, Dacca is deeply rooted in Bangladeshi culture.

Their design philosophy lies in showcasing artisanal crafts and Bangladeshi art. Traditional forms of crafting fabric such as hand embroidery, handloom, khadi, block print, katan, gamcha, and nakshi kantha are used to create the outfits. One may presume that these artforms only look good on traditional attire, but Dacca is all about modern street wear.

Sweatshirts, t-shirts, baggy pants, kimonos, masks – everything available in Dacca is canvas to some form of traditional art, and authentically so. Their design inspiration is mostly taken from classical paintings, poetry, postal stamps, and rural Bangladesh, which they attain by collaborating with rural artisans.

Dacca is essentially reinterpreting Bengali culture and craftsmanship via street fashion and making a global conversation about the artisanal craft of Bangladesh. Their recent Boishakhi collection features rickshaw art, postal stamps, poetry, rivers and rural Bangladesh.

In the odyssey of rapid urbanization and development, rickshaw art may be a fading craft. But this legacy can be kept alive by turning them into chic attires. While in the past, rickshaw art was a form of self-expression featuring religious and political views, hit movies, and history, in contemporary times, it can otherwise be reinvented to wearable art in order to keep the artform alive.

*Keep an eye on Dacca's social media handles for an exclusive documentary on rickshaw artists along with their Boishakhi collection and summer drop, where you can also buy original rickshaw panel art.*

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/fromdacca>

Instagram: <https://instagram.com/fromdacca?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

Website: <https://fromdacca.com>

**By Fariha Amber**  
**Photo: Dacca**







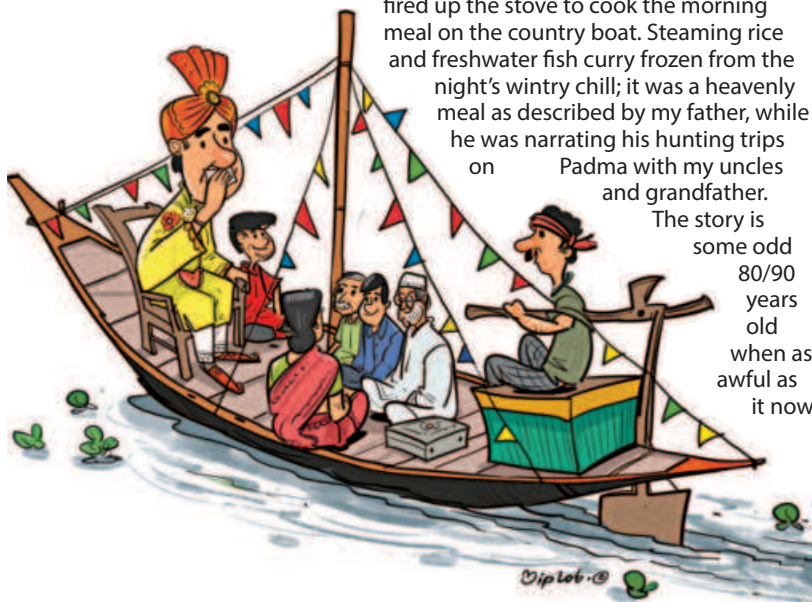
#PERSPECTIVE

## ... ABOUT A BOAT

A foggy winter morning with no indication of the sun coming out any soon, you see three large country boats slowly making its way through the creeks of the mighty Padma. The silhouette of an elderly man with a gun standing at the fore aiming at the cranes, the snipes and the grebes (*chokha*) is an unusual image. His sons

sitting still on the deck while the boatmen fired up the stove to cook the morning meal on the country boat. Steaming rice and freshwater fish curry frozen from the night's wintry chill; it was a heavenly meal as described by my father, while he was narrating his hunting trips on Padma with my uncles and grandfather.

The story is some odd 80/90 years old when as awful as it now



seems, hunting was a popular sport. My love for boats and boat journeys began from that point in time when my father re-counted his memory.

I love the country boats of Bangladesh—*bojra, goyna, mallar, panshi, dinghi*; such romantic names, and to think there are over 150 different types of boats in our country!

My most recent memory, a part of a day-long boat trip with almost five-star hospitality, was witnessing a loud and merry wedding procession on boats in the Sundarbans.

From the high deck of my launch I saw a string of boats decorated with purple, magenta, yellow paper flags, a mike booming latest Hindi wedding numbers— though this movie-like situation demanded the Bangla *leelabali* song; happy people dressed in bright dresses and saris were dancing to the beat. A groom in his white sherwani, paper flower garland, the sequin studded pagri sat on a high chair, which was sort of his dais, was smiling coyly at us, holding a white handkerchief over his mouth.

I joined the noise cheerfully, wishing good luck to his procession. I being the cynic, the dark clouds gathering at the afternoon horizon reminded me of Rabindranath's *Noukadubi* where two newlywed couples met with an accident while returning in a boat from their respective weddings; the prelude to an excitingly starry-eyed read.

I didn't want to spoil the romance of the

moment instead, and realised that the wedding parties, be those on boats, which is a rare sight for us now, or the more common motorcades, have the same wedding gaiety and merry-making regardless. Boisterous, giddy the groom going to his wedding and the coy bride-to-be waits for an eternal bliss of lifetime happiness be it in a thatched hut or a multi-storied apartment.

Coming back to my love for these water vessels, I have a legendary anecdote to share— would you think that I once carried a boat home? It was during a visit to a backwaters area— I was invited by our caretaker to his house. I waded through the duckweed and water-hyacinth filled waters in a *donga*, which is a dugout made out of Palmyra palm hull, to reach our destination. The elongated boat made from a tree trunk filled my mind with wonderful notions and I picked one up for Tk 3000, loaded it onto a pick-up van, and carried it all the way to my rooftop garden in Dhaka. It served as a flower bed for many years until the husk mixed with the mud and remained no more!

This first day of Boishakh, free yourself from all your urban bindings, ride a boat, have a hawai mithai, wear a rickshaw art tee and celebrate being Bangladeshi. Shuvo Noboborsho!

By RBR

Art: Biplob Chakroborty

ঐতিহ্যের আর এক তাম্র আধুনিকতা  
ঠিক যেমন রূপচর্চায় আভিজাত্য মানেই

# স্যান্ডালিনা সোপ



রূপচর্চায় আভিজাত্য...

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