

According to Japanese belief, Ningyo, which translates to 'human shape', has the power to bridge the differences of race and ethnicity, directly appealing to a life of abundance with childlike peace and beauty. These dolls are perceived as messengers who come to awaken the childlike beauty in us that dispel misfortune and bring us eternal peace. With that idea in mind, the Japanese Foundation, in collaboration with the Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh, inaugurated an exhibition titled **Ningyo: Art and Beauty of Japanese Dolls at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA) on Friday.**

Exploring the rich tapestry of Japanese culture through dolls

DOWEL BISWAS

From as early as the seventh century, dolls have consistently been an integral part of Japanese culture in terms of rites, fortune, abundance, blessing, entertainment, and even communication.

The Japanese Foundation curates a globe-trotting exhibition under the same title, traversing the world to foster international mutual understanding. At the heart of its mission lies the cultivation of friendship and connections between Japan and the global community, with a primary focus on arts and cultural exchange.

The exhibits at BSA's National Art Gallery transcend being mere reflections of Japanese society across epochs; they embody sophisticated techniques, technologies, and stylistic nuances in doll-making. Emphasising local diversity and the appreciation of natural beauty, these artefacts serve as poignant markers of Japan's artistic and cultural evolution throughout history.

In the exhibition, the development and changes in the shape of the dolls are represented according to the important time periods of Japan. This can be seen through the shape of the dolls, from the traditional to the collector figure. Not only that, this exhibition also displays "Ningyo" forms and styles with characteristics from each region in Japan.

Known for its century-old, rich, colourful cultural tapestry, Japan

that unknown land somewhat unfolded at the BSA exhibit, showcasing vivid, well-adorned, intricately crafted, and purposeful representations of regional dolls.

The foundation thoughtfully presented a careful selection of 67 dolls, introducing the historical evolution and cultural significance of Japanese dolls through four discerning sections: "Ningyo to pray for children's growth," "Ningyo as fine art," "Ningyo as folk art," and "Spread of Ningyo culture."

For instance, "Amagatsu" and "Hoko" dolls are designed to protect children from any misfortune that may befall them.

"Saga Ningyo" originated with dolls created via Buddhist sculptures, carved from wood and then richly adorned in gold and various types of paint to present patterns that stand out in relief. "Nara Ningyo" originated with small dolls offered to the gods at a festival held at Japan's Kasugataisha shrine in Nara prefecture. "Isho Ningyo" are art

originated to showcase Japan's aesthetics in traditional different clothing styles.

Among the folk dolls, "Miharu Ningyo" and "Takasaki Daruma" represent legendary Japanese warriors and heroes. "Hakara Ningyo" from the Edo period (1603-1868) represents a character called "Shojo", who is a fairy bequeathing a sake jug, which can never become empty to a young boy who is devoted to his parents. "Nara Ningyo" is a character from the

traditional Japanese Noh play "Shojo".

Likewise, each doll exhibited at the gallery represents a fragment of Japan that cannot be understood without exploring the others.

Most of these dolls are ingeniously crafted with mere wood, cloths, bamboo, and mud, while some of the dolls can be gifts that only grandparents present to their grandchildren during occasions of birth, puberty, and even graduation.

Doll culture has expanded into the world of traditional performing arts in Japan, considering they commemorate their doll festival on March 3 - a time when the flowers begin to bloom is the day to celebrate the growth of female children - the Japan Foundation and the Embassy of Japan arranged the exhibition to give a glimpse of Japan to Bangladesh.

Machida Tatsuya, Chargé d'Affaire, from the Embassy of Japan, expressed, "Bangladesh holds a special place as one of our closest friends, prompting us to consistently organise cultural exchange programs, ranging from music and dance to painting festivals. This time, we've brought a cherished cultural gem of Japan, 'Ningyo', to share with Bangladesh.

"Dolls like these are ubiquitous in Japanese households, symbolising a delicate connection that we believe strengthens the bonds of Japan-Bangladesh friendship. This marks an auspicious beginning, and we have extensive plans for fostering more cultural exchanges in the future," the Japanese Chargé d'Affaire stated.

For centuries, this ancient art form, originating in the period between 794 and 1185 AD, has served as a cultural vessel for the Japanese people, through which they offer prayers for the well-being and happiness of their children to shield them from misfortune. Evolving over time, "Ningyo" has transformed into a refined craft, inviting admiration for its aesthetic allure.

The exhibition will remain open for visitors until February 16.



Machida Tatsuya, Chargé d'Affaire, from the Embassy of Japan with guests and visitors at the exhibition.

PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

has always been a place of mystifying spectacles. No matter how much one delves into their distinctive culture and history, the awe and beauty of it persists. However, the charades of



Two decades of music for 'borderless' Saqi

Music has always wielded significant influence over Saqi Banerjee's life. He embarked on his musical odyssey in his youth, initially supporting his father - music director Bachchu Bandyopadhyay, when he was just 12 years old.

SHARMIN JOYA

"My musical upbringing naturally drew my focus towards it," remarked the singer and composer, who will celebrate his two decades in the musical realm this year. "I became part of the renowned band Cactus as a vocalist in 2017, and I remained with the group until 2020," he confirmed.

Siddhartho Roy, the founder of Cactus, noticed him during a reality show. "Interestingly, he reached out to me informally and said, 'Recite four lines from your work. If I find it appealing, I'll meet with you,' and that's how the journey began."

Gradually, Saqi immersed himself in the sphere of writing and crafting scripts for various reality shows such as ZEE Bangla's *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa*, as well as programmes on National Geographic and Discovery Channel, including *Didi No 1*. "During that period, I was also penning songs for various bands. In 2009, Rupankar Bagchi provided me with an opportunity in the film *Prem by Chance* as a songwriter," he recalled. The movie premiered in 2010.

Finally, he began receiving more offers, particularly highlighting the years 2012 and 2013 as pivotal in his career. "During this time, I had the chance to compose two songs for Srijit Mukherji's film *Jaatishwar - Singho Rashi and Bolo Konta Priyo*," he reminisced.

In 2015, he composed for the film *Guddu Ki Gun* (2015). He later went on to work on projects like the 2018 film *Biday Bomkesh* (Shondhe Namar Age), the 2018 television series *Charitraheen 2* (Borong Dukkho Diyo), and the 2020 film *Dracula Sir* (Abar Jonmo Nebo).

After working on these projects, he also earned nominations for prestigious awards like—Filmfare, WBF, and Mirchi Music Award, the last of which he won in two instances.

It was a fortunate year for the singer, as he got married to Esha

In this Ekushey Boi Mela, the multi-talented artiste has released the poetry book *Kholosh*, from publisher Noirita Café.

Yousuf, daughter of the esteemed couple Nasir Uddin Yousuff and Shimul Yousuf, in 2018. Soon, he decided to move to Bangladesh for music as well.

Saqi believes that art knows no boundaries, which led him to settle in Bangladesh because he perceived greater opportunities and exposure for music in the country. He expressed his decision by stating, "I felt that Bangladesh offers a broader platform for music. I no

longer wished to pursue music solely in West Bengal. It's not that I didn't receive love and support there; my band Brahmaputra was well-received and appreciated. However, I saw greater potential and possibilities in rock genre in this country."

"From my generation, I am the first to shift to Bangladesh since my grandfather was from Jessore," said the musician.

Saqi has also composed the background scores for the Hoichoi original web-series *Mobaroknama*, released on December 21. Earlier, he did background scores for *Dour* and *Buker Moddhye Agun*.

An interesting detail about this artiste that might escape notice is his involvement in the 2021 web-series *Contract*, as an actor, which was directed by Tanin Noor. "I took on the character of Lady Gias, a transgender individual associated with an underworld gang."

The artiste is now working on a few web series on both sides of the border. "I am also working with my band Brahmaputra with members Shopno, Riad, and Reza. The band completed two years last December. They also released a track commemorating the anniversary of their band, Ababil, in December, last year.

In this Ekushey Boi Mela, the multi-talented artiste has released the poetry book *Kholosh*, from publisher Noirita Café.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Poonam Pandey's alleged death was a publicity stunt

In a bizarre turn of events, Indian model, actor, and reality TV star Poonam Pandey, who was reported to have died of cervical cancer at the age of 32, has emerged alive, leaving fans and the public puzzled. The conflicting reports have ignited speculation about the authenticity of the news and the reasons behind what seems to be a shocking publicity stunt.



Initially, Poonam Pandey's team confirmed her death on Friday, citing cervical cancer as the cause. This led to widespread grief from fans and celebrities, as conveyed in a post on Poonam's official Instagram account, requesting privacy. However, Poonam contradicted these reports on Saturday through Instagram videos, asserting her well-being.

In a series of videos, Poonam expressed regret for causing shock and clarified the motive behind her controversial move.

The actor apologised for the distress caused by her staged demise and explained her intention behind the act. In another clip, she acknowledged faking her demise, stating it was an extreme measure. However, she highlighted the positive impact, bringing attention to cervical cancer and emphasising its urgency in the spotlight.

The incident has triggered a wider discussion on the ethical implications of resorting to extreme measures for publicity and the responsibility of media outlets to verify information before reporting.