

VOLUME 24, ISSUE 44, MONDAY, APRIL 14, 2025
BAISHAKH 1, 1432 BS

Star

LIFE

Style

E-mail: lifestyleds@yahoo.com
64-65 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215. A publication of *The Daily Star*

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PHOTO: TAPESTRY BY RASHID CHOUDHURY
FROM THE COLLECTION OF DURJOY
BANGLADESH FOUNDATION (DBF)

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#HISTORY & HERITAGE

PAHELA BAISHAKH

Origins and celebrations

Pahela Baishakh is the celebration of Bengali New Year. The name itself means First of Baishakh, the first month of the Bengali calendar. Pahela Baishakh now falls on the 14 of April of the Georgian calendar, and it is a day of joyous celebration in Bangladesh. But surely, you have wondered about its history and when or why did it all start?

The origin of Pahela Baishakh

It is believed that it was Mughal Emperor Akbar who facilitated the Bangla calendar or Bangabda.

The emperor's initiative was financial, rather than cultural.

Back in those days, agriculture was the main source of taxes, and was collected according to the Hijri calendar. The Hijri calendar, for those not in the know, is a lunar calendar, and was not in sync with crop seasons. This caused quite an issue, and the emperor took it upon himself to find a solution.

Upon his commission, Fatehullah Shirazi formulated a new calendar by aligning the

Islamic calendar with the

harvest season and

thus, solving the

issue. That's how

Bangabda

came into

being, and

we got

our Pahela

Baishakh

as the first

day of the

year. The

new calendar,

introduced on

10 or 11 March,

1584, was initially

known as Tarikh-e-Elahi.

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Shashanka of Gaur (Gauda) who brought

about the bangabda (Bengali calendar).

However, historians lean towards Emperor

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a culturally recognised celebration, it was celebrated with the opening of new halkhata. It has survived the test of time, and still can be spotted in the shops and businesses in many areas. Once upon a time, zamindars did the same.

Festive decorations go hand in hand with halkhata in the form of confetti, flowers, and colourful designs. And of course — sweetmeats.

The Baishakhi celebration essentially kicks off with a cultural programme hosted by Chhayanaut, a cultural organisation established in 1961. Chhayanaut's first Nababarsha celebration began at the altar of the huge bot (banyan) tree, which is actually an ashwattha tree, but the place is well known by the mellifluous name — 'Ramna-r Botomul.'

There are also colourful processions, not just in Dhaka but also all across the country.

And a major part of Baishakhi

celebration has to do with foods.

Sweetmeats are distributed, both for opening new halkhatas, and to welcome the new year.

Red and white colours are seen in plenty, along with yellow to match the festivity. Panjabi and saree are of particular interest, and shopping prior to Pahela Baishakh has also caught on, which tells you a lot about the festivity and celebration, and how passionately people celebrate Pahela Baishakh.

As uncomfortable as an April day can be in Bangladesh, it does not put a dent in the celebration of Pahela Baishakh. Not only do people don fashionably colourful dresses, but they also go out, have fun, and enjoy a good meal with friends and family.

By Ashif Ahmed Rudro

Photo: Anisur Rahman; Sazzad Ibne Sayed



All Time Bread – Delightful Baishakh desserts that hit the right spot



Pahela Baishakh in Dhaka is a full-blown sensory overload — think streets painted red and white, Dhaka University campus bursting at the seams, and the unmistakable scent of panta and shutki drifting through the air from someone’s rooftop party. It’s the one day when the city collectively hits pause on deadlines and diets, and decides to live a little.

But while the morning starts with hilsa and mustard, and the afternoon is soaked in mango juice and mishti, what about the sweet ending?

Not everyone has the time (or stamina) to simmer payesh for hours.

This is where All Time Bread pulls a little sorcery.

Yes, bread — that reliable kitchen staple! Turns out, with a little twist, it can moonlight as a dessert base so good, even your mishti-loving mama might ask for seconds.

So, for those who want to sweeten their Pahela Baishakh without breaking into a full-on culinary sweat, here are two easy, crowd-friendly desserts that bring just the right blend of tradition and innovation.

Bread Malai Toast

Take the familiar comfort of malai and give it a shortcut makeover. This *Bread Malai Toast* is rich, creamy, and

unreasonably easy to make. Perfect for when the guests have overstayed their welcome, and you’re two cups of cha away from a breakdown.

Thick slices of All Time Bread are toasted in ghee and bathed in cardamom-scented milk, then crowned with crushed nuts. It’s got all the notes of a proper deshi dessert — without turning your kitchen into a sauna.

Ingredients

4 slices of All Time Bread
2 cups full cream milk
2 tbsp sugar (adjust to taste)
¼ tsp cardamom powder
A few saffron strands (for that royal touch)
Crushed pistachios or almonds
Ghee or butter for toasting

Method

Toast the bread in ghee until golden brown. Boil the milk with sugar, cardamom, and saffron until slightly thickened. Dip each toast gently in the milk — no drowning, just enough for a soak. Garnish with chopped nuts and serve warm or chilled. Either way, it’s a win.

Chocolate Bread Delight

Let’s be honest: not everyone is into traditional sweets, especially after a heavy panta-ilish breakfast and enough bharta to last till next Baishakh. For those leaning more towards “dessert-dessert,” *Chocolate Bread Delight* is the fix.

Ingredients

4 slices of All Time Bread
100g dark or milk chocolate

2 tbsp cream or milk
Chopped nuts, sprinkles, or even dried fruit
A dash of salt (optional, but trust the process)

Method

Melt the chocolate with cream using a microwave or double boiler. Cut the bread into triangles or quirky shapes, and lightly toast if you like a bit of crunch. Drizzle or spread the chocolate over the pieces, top with nuts, or whatever your sweet stash allows, and pop it in the fridge for a few minutes — or eat it right there, standing in the kitchen. No one’s watching.

Why this works for Baishakh

We love a good traditional mishti platter. But these desserts? They’re for the days when you want to keep things fun, simple, and a little unexpected. Whether it’s a rooftop adda, a quiet family lunch, or an impromptu potluck, *Bread Malai Toast* and *Chocolate Bread Delight* bring comfort and creativity to the table without demanding half your day.

All Time Bread is that kitchen companion that never lets you down — it’s always there, doesn’t need soaking overnight, and doesn’t require a master’s in patisserie to work with.

So, this Pahela Baishakh, between the panta platters and deshi drums, sneak in something sweet and effortless. Whether you’re indulging your inner child with chocolate or reliving old-school malai memories with a modern twist, these desserts hit just the right note.

By K Tanzeel Zaman

#PERSPECTIVE

JIBANANANDA

The poet who knew me best

I was introduced to Jibanananda in 1999. In December of the penultimate year of the last millennium, I became 18; Jibanananda Das had just turned 100 in February. At a crossroad of life, my first bitter-sweet taste of adulthood was marked by the feeling of losing oneself completely at the altar of love, only to be followed by the empty feeling of love lost.

I cannot recollect the 'tingles' of first love, not even the moments most people seem to cherish; burdened with the suffering of dejection for something that I knew was pure in my heart, I cannot seem to relive the moments — neither blissful, nor utter disdain.

I still carry Porna with me or the image of her in my heart, not through the moments shared, or the sleepless nights of displeasure, but through the words of Das.

I am not a critic; I shy to even call myself a lover of poetry. But Jibanananda struck a chord in me, who seemed all alone in a battle that cannot be won. It was something I could relate to.

Almost two decades have passed since the introduction of a naive 18-year-old with the literary giant, but life still throws its tempestuous blows, and moments of glee, and till this day, the conversations between Jibanananda Das and I, continue.

Jibanananda Das is a name unparalleled in Bangla literature; unfortunately, as has been the case of most Bengali poets, his works still remain to be translated for a wider, global audience. The scanty translations available often fail to convey the flavour of his wordplay, and the vivid imageries that he draws in his lines. Perhaps, that is true for all poets, but being 'lost in translation' has been the fate of most of his works.

Bangla literature is rich, and its first step toward reaching a global audience was through Tagore. Yet, even after being one of most iconic of Nobel laureates, Tagore himself is not as widely read as one would assume.

Although immortalised through his poetry, Das's entire gamut of literature is beyond belief. The prolific author penned poetry and prose, much of which was published posthumously. The shy Jibanananda never published in his lifetime any of the proses he had written, and unfortunate as it seems, his short stories and novels still remain overshadowed by the majesty of his poetic prowess. That, however, does not mean that his literary works in other forms are any inferior.

My introduction to Das was through poetry, and I perceive him as a poet still. While critics compare him to the likes of Tagore, Nazrul and a few others — to me, he is truly the 'purest poet.'

All his life, Das disdained such generalisations. But even I, as a Jibanananda aficionado, cannot help but

label him as such!

In the preface to 'Shreshtha Kavita' published in 1854, he wrote — My poems or the poet of these verses have been called the lonely poet of the loneliest of poets by some; some have said that these poems are primarily of nature or full of historical or social consciousness, others have labelled them as poems of resignation; still others consider them to be exclusively symbolic; completely derived from the unconscious; surrealist and so on. I have noticed many other labels. All of them are partially correct — they do apply to some poems or some phases, but no one of them explain all of my poetry.

JIBANANANDA, & I

It was taken that I would first seek to discover Jibanananda's poetry through the most celebrated love poems. For me, that was a disappointing start; my limitation!

As someone passing a watershed moment that marked my introduction to adulthood, I found his romantic poetry simple; his heroines lacking the panache.

The image of Porna overpowered Bonolota when it came to seeking solace in my heart. The images of her engrossed in a hearty conversation with her male friend, overwhelmed the jealousy Jibanananda felt for Suranjana's male acquaintances.

True, I was solitary in my discovery of Das; my only companion 'Jibanananda Dasher Shreshtha Kavita' [Edited by Abdul Mannan Syed]. But I knew there was something more to the words, it was clear that the embarrassing language barrier made it impossible for me to fully grasp what he was saying.

I knew poetry is something that should be read and re-read until the imageries become clear and the conceit reveal themselves. And re-read a few times more. And I never gave up.

I am neither a poet nor a connoisseur. I struggle with meter or rhyme, or what separates Shakespearean sonnets from Bangla ones.

Two decades since those December nights, I still read the same poetry and find new meaning every single time. But I still cannot let him be, and not

conceptualise his works in any one of the 'labels' he despised.

It is possible that his disdain of being restricted under an umbrella was primarily because of the poor response he received from fellow poets, readers, and critics. In his lifetime, Jibanananda could never imagine what his works will mean to the generations that followed.

While commenting on the influence of Das in our modern lives, renowned academician Abdul Mannan Sayed wrote —

"Why do people read poetry? And why do poets pen their poems? There are no plausible answers to these questions... His life — both the inner identity or the outward self, is shrouded in mystery. Yet, to this current generation of Bangalis, there is widespread interest surrounding this very poet. In the turbulent sixties,

when we were immersed in an effort to re-discover and re-define our identity, he was our companion."

Syed spoke my mind. In my quest of self-discovery, and in an attempt to pin an identity for myself, I too found him an honest companion.

NO DREAM — NO CALM — SOME OVERWHELMING SENSATION

It is difficult to describe what I found while unearthing the treasures of Jibanananda's poetry; a rattled mind, a stirred soul, and a voice that created an overwhelming sensation through his wordplay —

I move towards a twilight world — in my head

No dream — some overwhelming sensation is at work!

No dream — no calm — no love...

I cannot evade it,

It takes me by its hand. Everything becomes irrelevant —

All my thoughts become futile.

All prayers meaningless,
So meaningless!

Das has a cult following, mostly by the youth, who, without exception, carry on for the rest of their lives. As a first-time reader, I could not evade from the reality that he clairvoyantly termed — 'Bodh' (sensation/or consciousness).



The poetry did little to assuage the pain; much to my anguish, it aggravated it. Yet, for my bipolar mind, and a soul torn between modern living and the resulting injustice it creates, it came as an assurance that in this fight, I am not alone — and in such a manner, these taunting lines seemed like words of comfort.

For once, I could understand what Das was all about; there is more to him than the poetry that depicts the picturesque setting of Barishal; or the tranquillity he felt for Ms Sen. As I dug deep into the abyss that is Jibanananda's consciousness, I realised there is so much more to him than those oft repeated works.

While explaining his own stance to life and poetry in general, Jibanananda said —

A mature artist — does not propose to evade the riddles around him... He arrives at his own philosophy and builds in his own world, which is never a negation of the actual one, but this is the same world organised more truly and proportionately by the special reading of it by the special poet.

This, I feel, is a universal statement. As a poet, Das was touched by what he saw, and the words expressed the emotions that the images evoked in him. He had led a large part of his life in pastoral Bengal, and a fair share in the modern metropolises of India under the crown.

This gave him a unique insight, which many authors — his contemporaries or his predecessors — lacked.

Jibanananda has always been honest in his expression. The fact that his published work does not reflect the timeline, or the development of his poetic vision, makes it difficult for us to see how he evolved as a poet. But once viewed in the gamut of his entire work (much may

remain unpublished still), one finds a 'thinking poet'; one who interacts with society and living. At this point, whether he talks about the romantic setting at the bank of the Dhanshiri, or socialites of Calcutta and their clubs with tennis courts, becomes irrelevant, simply because he is just penning what he felt whenever and whatever he saw.

What I gather, his definition of a poet is a universal statement for all mature souls. As we age, we arrive at our own philosophy and build our own world — and never a negation of the actual one. The 18-year-old me found some more answers in his words.

— Who can keep going on as simple-minded people would!

Who can get off in this twilight station

As the simple-minded would! Who Can

Speak in their tongues anymore? Who knows

Anything for certain anymore? Who knows

Anything for certain any longer? Who bothers

To relish bodily desires now? Who can

Taste again, as every man once did, the soul's delight?

It would be wrong to say that at the pivotal moment of life, I was confronted with the affliction of love alone. Far from it! The societal pressure on a boy thought to achieve greatness in life, but falling far short, has to bear a load that one simply cannot offload. The spiralling effect of a bipolar sinking in quicksand was, and still is, a haunting feeling that stays with me.

Walking along beaches — crossing shores I try to shake it off;

I want to grab it as I would a dead man's skull

And dash it on the ground; yet like a live man's head,

It wheels all around my head!

How it possesses my heart!

If I move, it moves along

with me.

If I stop —

It

stops

too;

Acclaimed translator of Das's work, Professor Fakrul Alam, noted an interesting point. As a footnote to the poem, Bodh, he wrote —

"People...have described him as a man who often seemed to be in a trance."

And he goes on to say, "This, it seems to the translator, is a poem about a man overwhelmed by the poetic fit and, indeed consumed by it."

Professor Alam's assumption is based on a comment by none other than Das himself —

The desire to create

artworks, the thirst for them...this life-long curse of the artists has destroyed all possibilities of being a social success. Nevertheless, I have not tried to abandon the fate of the artist for the haven of the family; no artist can do so.

LOVE — THE UNIVERSAL EMOTION

Scholars are divided on facts surrounding his personal life. While many agree that he had fallen in love at a tender age, he

was to marry someone else. It is quite clear that his marital life was chequered with afflictions.

The restless Jibanananda found it difficult to settle in any position, and his wanderlust took him from the remote region of South Bengal to the metropolis of West Bengal. This itself is enough reason for some marital discord.

His heroines are often described as vicious and full of guile. At times, the heroines are dead and dreadful. Yet, after his quest for solace of a thousand years, he finds peace in Nature's Bonolata Sen! But how does he consolidate his consciousness and love?

He writes —

I had looked at a woman lovingly,

I had looked at her uncaringly,

I had looked at her hatefully.

Every worn soul can relate to this. The initial days of separation or dejection is a haze where feelings of love and hate collide; the overwhelming consciousness throwing the heart into the deepest, darkest abyss of guilt. And more so, when one starts to doubt himself —

She had loved me,

She had ignored me —

When I called her lovingly again and

again

She had gone away hating me;

But once I could restrain myself — rein in my love;

Her words of contempt

The intensity of hate

I was able to ignore once — whatever the stars had decreed

Again and again as obstacles to my love

I had forgotten;

Still my love — dust and grime —

Jibanananda's love is often

platonic, and at times, full of

lustful overtones. Some hint

on a carnal desire set so loose

that it leads to incest. I find Jibanananda as a poet far from being confused, but troubled by the multiplicity of human emotions; its strength in harnessing and cherishing the beauty of love, and then again often succumbing to pure lust.

Of gazing at the face of a man!

Of gazing at the face of a woman!

Of gazing at the face children!

This sensation — this very desire

So immense — overwhelming!

A FULL CIRCLE?

Perhaps, there is truth to the fact that Jibanananda himself was the architect of his death; others vehemently protest that this was sheer accident. The myriad troubles in his life, and the trauma of the dreadful partition that forever took him away from his beloved Dhanshiri possibly made it impossible for Das to reconcile with. Some say, he felt alien to the land that he had to now call his home.

Now standing older and taller, perhaps wiser too, I wish I had thought of life differently when I met Das. My world view has changed, and as I now read him, I cannot pause and wonder, what if his life was different? What if our lives were different?

Did my naive teenage love forever break my heart, or did it teach me to seek and cherish all the love that life throws at me?

In the late autumnal grassland blue flowers bloom —

The heart flutters who knows why,

"I loved" — embers — guilt ridden —

memories

Why do they confront me still?

Perhaps, that is because we are human.

While some simply sigh and move on, others find themselves drowning in quicksand, yet desperately trying to stay calm. Maybe those who see themselves get drawn into quicksand in the first place, never can.

Did she — had Sujata fallen in love with me?

Is she in love with me still?

Electrons hurl about in the orbits on their own;

In which purged fading sky will the answer resound?

Such thoughts are perilous and redundant if one wishes to lead life positively. It is trivial to ponder over Pona after two decades, when in all certainly, she has moved ahead as I have. And even after being immersed in a bottomless pit of sorrow, Jibanananda often does have an affirmative view of life.

Sujata is in Bhubenshwar now;

Is Amita in Mihijam?

Not knowing where she has been is a good thing — in every way!

Blue white flowers bloom in the grass in the late autumnal scene;

Its placid course in one aspect of time;

And yet it is never completely still;

Every day new life forms take root again.

Truly, new life forms take root again.

Sometimes I wishfully think, only if I could show Jibanananda, my one true friend, how beautiful the flowers still bloom, and will always bloom.

By Mannan Mashhur Zarif

Excerpts taken from the translation of Jibanananda Das's poetry — 'Bodh' and 'Loken Boser Journal' (translated by Professor Fakrul Alam).

Note: This article was previously published in The Daily Star's 2019 anniversary supplement

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed





#ARTS **HOW** **RASHID CHOUDHURY** wove his way to **art fame**

"I did not feel satisfied with the usual oils and watercolours. As piano and organ are excellent musical instruments but not much effective for solo performances, there are typical mediums in the field of art which have their limitations... I was, therefore, looking for a medium through which, I can fittingly depict men and nature of my motherland. My search has borne fruit at last, I found my destination in tapestry."



One of the oldest forms of textile art, it has been used to create objects we see in our everyday lives, from dresses to purses and table covers, as well as some of the most beautiful artworks. Tapestry as an art form flourished in medieval Europe, and was introduced here at the hands of artist Rashid Choudhury in the 1960s. One of the most renowned

exponents of modern art, Rashid Choudhury took it upon himself to venture into uncharted territory. It demanded time, technique, and tremendous dedication — particularly in a place where the form was virtually unknown. He committed himself fully, pioneering a genre and creating monumental works that today stand as cultural landmarks. And he did so with



style and finesse, creating signature pieces that undeniably cry out "Rashid Choudhury." Traditionally, large tapestries added vibrant colours to any space; they were both functional and provided food for thought through their dramatic depiction of Biblical stories, mythology, and the classics, or just mere portrayals

movements of the time. Like most of his peers, he developed a keen appreciation for abstract art. And, rather than simply following the Western styles, he sought to merge the spirit of indigenous forms of Bengal with European techniques. Under the guidance of French artist Jean Lurçat — "the father of modern tapestry" — Choudhury settled on the medium he is most known for today.

Born into an aristocratic family in rural Bengal, it is hardly a surprise that Choudhury was influenced by the various religions and cultures of the land.

Some of his creations are visual narratives while others are far more abstract, evoking emotion and rhythm through form and texture. His tapestries often carry figurative elements like stylised human forms recalling folk or mythological figures. His use of colours is a reference to the strong, earthy palettes that evoke the landscapes and moods of this region. Rashid Choudhury made abundant use of themes drawing from Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic traditions — expressing ethos true to our pluralistic heritage. His tapestries are large, mural-like pieces, and some of his best-known works adorn government buildings, universities, and cultural centres in Dhaka and beyond. These were not just decorative but deeply symbolic, and meant to inspire reflection on our identity, nature, and spirituality.

of people's lives. They were, and still are, costly and time-consuming to produce, and perfect for showing off the owner's opulence and fine taste!

Born into an aristocratic family in rural Bengal, it is hardly a surprise that Choudhury was influenced by the various religions and cultures of the land. He enrolled in the Government Art Institute of Dhaka, where he started as a painter, honing his skills in more traditional forms like watercolours and oils. However, Choudhury would soon immerse himself in the avant-garde art scene. As Choudhury himself once said, "Life finds its autonomy through expression. And death, in silence. That is why, it is through the expression of joy and sorrow that we are truly alive. And we attain immortality through our actions."

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Choudhury's tapestries helped redefine the boundaries of Bangladeshi art. His influence continues to be felt in the contemporary art scene. As Choudhury himself once said, "Life finds its autonomy through expression. And death, in silence. That is why, it is through the expression of joy and sorrow that we are truly alive. And we attain immortality through our actions."

By Mannan Mashhur Zarif
Photo: Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation (DBF)
Tapestry by Rashid Choudhury



#FOOD & RECIPES

Wise Ghat's watermelon wave DHAKA'S SEASONAL DELIGHT

If you've been to Wise Ghat very recently, you'll be familiar with the scene of watermelons being unloaded from boats. With summer here, watermelons have arrived at the perfect time. Now that the markets are overflowing with fresh watermelons, it's the best time to enjoy this refreshing fruit after a long day out!





The sight of fresh, vibrant watermelons piled high on boats and nearby stalls create a beautiful contrast against the bustling streets of Old Dhaka. The markets are alive with the colours of summer.

It was around 2 PM when labourers were unloading watermelons from boats. Some were still working under the hot sun, while others took a break after hours of hard labour. We approached Md Nesar, a labourer, resting under the shade, to learn more about their contribution.

"We are labourers, and we unload watermelons using bamboo baskets. For each watermelon, we earn Tk 3 to Tk 3.5. We carry them in batches of 8 to 10 and unload them at the nearby stores," Nesar shares.

When asked about the supply this year, he shares, "There are only a few boats now, as you can see here, but soon, the number of boats will increase, and so will the watermelons."

But it's not just watermelons that arrive at the riverbank. "Fruits like lychees, pineapples, guavas, dragon fruits, papayas, and mangoes also arrive by boats. We work all year round, not just during watermelon season," explains Limon, another labourer.

We found Hasib, the Sardar — someone who arranges labourers for unloading fruits, giving orders to his men to work properly. He himself started as a labourer, and has been in the Sardar profession for nearly 8 years. His family has been in the business for about 40 years, starting with his grandfather.

You might wonder how watermelons are distributed fairly, when they come in different sizes. According to their terminology, there are four size categories, each priced differently. The largest is called 'Mati,' followed by 'Majhla,' 'Tin Number,' and the smallest, 'Kat.'

"To keep things simple, they are often referred to as sizes 1, 2, 3 and 4. There is a designated man on the boat whose job is to ensure the watermelons are distributed properly," Hasib explains.

When asked how they keep track of the number of watermelons each labourer unloads, Hasib describes, "There's a simple system. Every time a labourer carries watermelons from the boat, the person assigned hands him a stick with signs sealed on it. The sticks help keep count of how many watermelons he has unloaded."

So, where do all the watermelons come from? The watermelons come from



Rangabali, locally known as the capital of watermelons, as well as from Galachipa, Char Fasson, and Bhola. They travel in large boats from Barishal, Bhola, or Patuakhali, and are unloaded at Wise Ghat, Hajiganj, or Fatullah before the Asr prayer call. Some watermelons also arrive by truck and are distributed to different wholesale markets across the city.

"There are other wholesale watermelon markets apart from the one here. Karwan Bazar, Hajiganj, and Jatrabari also have their wholesale markets," shares Hasib.

Sardar Hasib also introduced us to deeper insights into how this trade operates. Though the process may seem simple, it involves people with multiple responsibilities. There are two main roles: 'Byapari' and 'Aratdar.'

The Aratdar is a wholesaler who provides loans to the Byapari. The Byapari then manages the entire watermelon cultivation process and sells the produce with a commission. "This means that a single watermelon supports the livelihoods of farmers, byaparis, aratdars, sardars, labourers and many others," Hasib explains.

The wholesale market, standing on the other side of the road from Wise Ghat, is known as Alf Sani (R.A) Market, located at 7 Ahsan Ullah Road. From here, watermelon supplies spread across the entire city. Jitu, an Aratdar, explains, "We sell in bulk — either per 100 or per 150 watermelons, depending on the production. It can start from Tk 20 and go up to Tk 300 or more per piece."

The watermelon season lasts for almost four months. During this time, thousands of people work hard to ensure that fresh watermelons reach markets and consumers. The trade is more than just buying and selling — it is a long-standing tradition that supports many families. As the season continues, the river will get busier, boats will bring in more loads — this is the only hope of all the people involved.

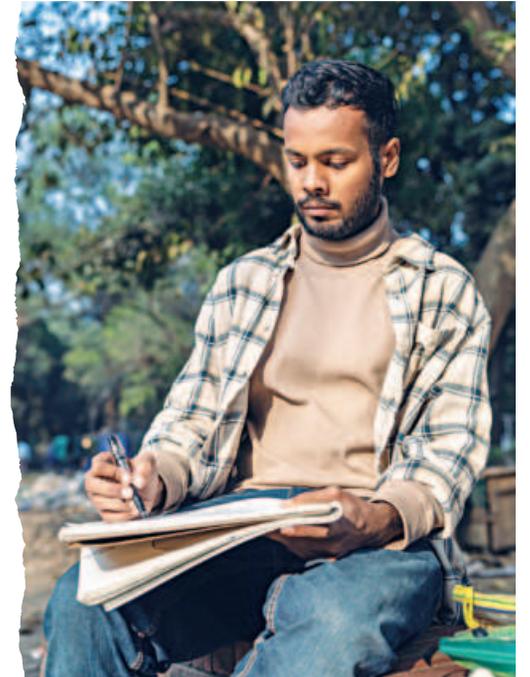
By Jawwad Sami Neogi
Photo: Jawwad Sami Neogi



Nazir Hossain

#PERSPECTIVE

Discover the artists bringing awe to Dhaka's streets



Md Fazar Ali

Finding time to visit art galleries and exhibitions often feels like a luxury we cannot afford in this city of ours. But what if art finds you on your way to the office, or on morning walks? Yes, there are some artists in Dhaka whose creations are not confined within the walls of a gallery — they breathe in the open. These hidden visionaries and performers have turned our pavements into canvases and street corners into galleries. It's subtle yet subversive, an unassuming revolution in broad daylight! Today, let's dive into their stories.

Scrolls of the streets

The very first person we start with is Nazir Hossain, better known as 'Tiger Nazir.' He is a self-taught potua, or scroll painter. He earned the name by painting tigers in scroll art. You will spot him outside Charukala, near the National Museum in Shahbagh. With brushes in hand and a canvas covered with paint, he, himself, appears to be a live canvas. You may even be fortunate enough to see his fresh paintings hanging from a rope if you happen to go there at the perfect time. Whatever, whenever, speaks to Nazir's spirit; he paints it with a touch of tiger in it.

Nazir's talent gained international recognition in 2015 when his powerful and graceful artwork, Bantora Kun, was chosen as the mascot for Bangladesh-Japan business circles. He first displayed his scroll paintings at ChobirHaat, an open-air art gallery near Dhaka University.

Nazir also contributed to a novel, Tuki the Tiger by Alexis Krasilovsky and Shameem Akhtar, with his colourful and lively illustrations.

Despite his achievements, Hossain remains grounded, always carrying our national flag tied around his forehead. When asked about his inspiration, Nazir Hossain simply states, "It was my mother's nakshi kantha that brought me here. The patterns she stitched, the stories she told with her needle, still inspire my art."

Hossain prefers to paint on the streets, not for lack of opportunity, but for a sense of purpose. "The streets keep me connected to people," he says. "Art isn't just about galleries; it's about reaching those who might never step into one. It's about making them pause, reflect, and feel something."

Melodies in the air

A few steps away from Nazir Hossain, you'll find Md Lal Mea outside Charukala, a bongshibajok (flute maestro) who has been crafting and playing his beloved flutes for nearly 40 years. You will see him playing his flute while waiting for curious passers-by to stop and admire his work.

Seeing him then and there playing his flute, I could not resist striking up a conversation. But before I could finish, he totally cut me off with a surprising question, "Is this the first time you've noticed me here?" And the answer from my side was



a simple "Yes," but his response left me speechless — "You've been studying here for more than five years, yet you never noticed me. See? That's the life of a street artist in this country; a few admirers and our passion are all that keep us going."

Lal Mea's words put me in guilt. He made me think of a family I used to see at Rabindra Shorobor — a father and daughter duo singing soulful Bhatiyali songs, drawing a small crowd with their heartfelt performances. But they're no longer there. Perhaps they, too, were

casualties of the unrelenting battle for survival on Dhaka streets.

Through the looking glass

There's another dedicated soul — Mohammad Hiru, the bioscope-wala in a clown costume. Although he ditches the costume in summer, you will always spot him with his colourful hat that never fails to draw attention.

Hiru usually sets up after 5 PM near Anam Rangs Plaza at 6/A Satmasjid Road, Dhanmondi, where he showcases his handcrafted bioscope with pride. He sings



songs of all kinds when you peer into the tiny holes of his bioscope.

"This bioscope is my dream box," says Hiru bhai, every time I ask him about it. "I have made my own bioscope from scratch, with no master to guide me," he shares. "The first time I saw one at a village fair in Bogra, I just knew I had to create my own. I was a kid back then. But now, here I am, living that dream." Though Hiru Bhai, too, faced his fair share of consequences while following his dream on the streets. Yet his passion keeps him going.

To me, Mohammad Hiru is a living reminder of the beauty and persistence of street art. What fills my heart is seeing him standing as a beacon of resilience against all odds.

Brushstrokes of resilience

Now, let's talk about a part-time street artist, Md Fazar Ali, studying graphic design at the University of Dhaka. He is often seen with his canvas and brushes, capturing the world around him through his strokes. Whether at the Central Shaheed Minar or Kamalapur Railway Station, you will see him creating portraits and sketches.

But there are drawbacks to Fazar's love of art as well. "The lack of interest I encounter from others can be disheartening at times," he says. "I was once insulted by a customer when I brought up the cost of a hand-drawn sketch. According to him, printing a high-resolution photo would be better and less expensive than my sketch."

Fazar's words sheds light on the often-overlooked struggles of artists who put their all into their work, only to face a lack of recognition for the value of their work.

What I realised after talking to all of them is that art isn't really accepted here, let alone appreciated! And when it's on the street, it is seen as something unnecessary, even frivolous.

However, people like Lal Mea, Hiru Bhai, or Tiger Nazir are still there. Being the stubborn gatekeeper of their passion and our culture!

So next time you hear the soft strains of a flute or catch a glimpse of a colourful scroll, stop for a moment. Listen. See. Because behind every note and brushstroke is a story of resilience here.

By Jannatul Bushra
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel

#FASHION & BEAUTY

CELEBRATE PAHELA BAISHAKH RIGHT

Fresh colours, bold prints, new you

There was a time when Pahela Baishakh fashion was synonymous with red and white — crisp white cottons, bold red borders, and a touch of alta on the feet. And while this timeless combo still holds a special place in our hearts (and wardrobes), recent years have seen a delightful shift. The Bengali New Year is slowly shedding



its monochrome uniform and embracing a new canvas of colours, prints, and playful styling.

This year, we say: keep the spirit, ditch the cliché. Let's go beyond red and white.

Magenta magic

If there's one colour combination giving red and white a serious run for its money, it is white and magenta. The vibrancy of magenta brings in just the right amount of boldness without overwhelming the calmness of white. From handloom



saris with magenta thread work to plain kameezes with printed or embroidered magenta dupattas that flow like summer breeze, this pairing is fast becoming a crowd favourite, and for good reason! It is festive, fresh, and oh-so-flattering.

Polka dots, please!

Who would've thought that the old-school charm of polka dots would become a Pahela Baishakh staple? But here we are; living and loving it. Polka dots bring an instant burst of fun to any outfit.

Whether it's a retro sari with oversized dots or a breezy kameez with tiny scattered ones, this peppy pattern adds movement, mischief, and a whole lot of personality. Bonus points if you pair it with chunky earrings and a messy bun.

Sunshine and teal dreams

Yellow is a classic for a reason — it is bright,

sunny, and it practically radiates joy. Pair it with teal, and you've got a combination that's equal parts cool and warm. Think teal kameez with yellow embroidery, or a mustard saree with teal blouse and accessories. It's perfect for that brunch-to-evening dinner transition.



Rise of prints and pastels

While bold colours are making a statement, pastels and soft florals aren't far behind. Blush pinks, powder blues, and mint greens are showing up in cotton and muslin sarees, often paired with quirky blouses or contrasting accessories.

Digital prints, hand-painted florals, and abstract motifs are also finding fans among those who prefer subtle elegance over loud hues.

Styling it your way

Gone are the days of rigid outfit rules. Mix



and match is the way to go. Team your traditional saree with a crop top or a denim jacket, or your kameez over contrasting trousers to create your statement co-ord. Play with accessories — beads, silver jhumkas, glass bangles, or just a statement bag. The idea is to reflect the energy of the new year in your own way.

Pahela Baishakh has always been about the celebration of culture, of colour, and of community. And what better way to do that than by dressing in outfits that make you feel festive, fearless, and fabulous? Whether you're stepping out for a party, or lounging at a home dawat, this year, let your outfit be as joyful, vibrant, and diverse as the day itself.

By Nusrath Jahan

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

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EBL credit cards: Best in class offerings

Eastern Bank PLC (EBL) has been recognised as a pioneer in modernising the digital payment landscape of Bangladesh with its robust portfolio of modern payment solutions, especially credit cards. EBL credit cards are now a part and parcel of lives of its customers, offering convenience and unmatched utility, ensuring international best service excellence.

EBL started its credit card business with Visa, the predominant global payment network, and became an instant hit. EBL Visa Platinum Credit Card and the EBL Visa Signature Credit Card are at the forefront of EBL's Visa propositions, catering to the lifestyle needs of its vast customer base. These cards offer a variety of features such as access to domestic and international airport lounges, Meet and Greet Service, exclusive discount at hundreds of selected merchants, insurance coverage, and maximum 45-day interest-free period. The EBL Visa Infinite Card sits at the top of the premium segment of EBL Credit Cards, offering vouchers cashback on retail purchase transactions. The EBL Visa Daraz Co-Brand Credit Card comes with exclusive cashback offers for purchases made at Daraz.

EBL and Visa have also collaborated with multiple prominent corporate entities and organizations such as FBCCI, BGMEA, BGCCI, Lavender, IBCCI, BKMEA, KBCCI, ICSB, etc. to introduce co-brand cards with tailored propositions. To top it off, the EBL Visa credit cards are also bundled with exclusive BOGO offers at popular restaurant and hotel chains. Through EBL ZIP, cardholders



can not only avail EMI plans with 0 per cent instalment, but also an opportunity to avail cashback offers.

The EBL Mastercard Credit Cards are also popular with customers for their exclusivity and unique features. For the travel-savvy audience, the EBL SkyTrip Mastercard Co-Brand Credit Card offers incredible value. Cardholders can enjoy a 15 per cent discount on the base fare on selected local airlines when booking through ShareTrip. Customers can save up to Tk 5,000 per month on domestic flights and up to Tk 15,000 per month on international flights. The welcome pack with the SkyTrip card also contains Holiday package, a bundle

of exciting vouchers. The card is bundled with discount offers at international hotels, baggage protection, travel insurance, and extra reward points on cross-border transactions. Another incredible proposition of the card is complimentary access to global lounge and EBL Skylounge, making it the ultimate choice for tourists.

The EBL Diners Club Credit Cards are ideal for the cardholder's day-to-day necessities. The cards feature a year-round 5 per cent cashback on grocery purchases, and 10 per cent cashback at Aarong, helping the cardholder to save more by spending more. The cards also come with incredible propositions from

MetLife, including premium subscription to the One by MetLife App. The subscription provides the cardholder access to online consultation and discounts at partner hospitals through Life Card by MetLife, and in-hospitalization insurance benefits.

The benefits don't just end there, with the EBL Vroom Diners Club International Credit Card, the cardholder gets numerous propositions from Vroom, for regular maintenance of cardholder's personal vehicle. Additionally, the supplementary fuel card is a useful accessory. This special card can only be used in fuel stations, which allows the cardholder to maintain fuel related expenses separately.

The EBL UnionPay Contactless Platinum Credit Card is targeted towards the dedicated travellers to East Asia, particularly China. Considering the growing economic relationships with China and the widespread acceptance of UnionPay in the country, the EBL UnionPay Credit Card is the ideal choice for cardholders willing to conduct seamless financial transactions for travel and business purposes.

The dynamic series of EBL premium credit cards are best known for its lucrative customer reward program SKYCOINS, its state-of-the-art mobile banking app SKYBANKING and for its unmatched service excellence.

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