

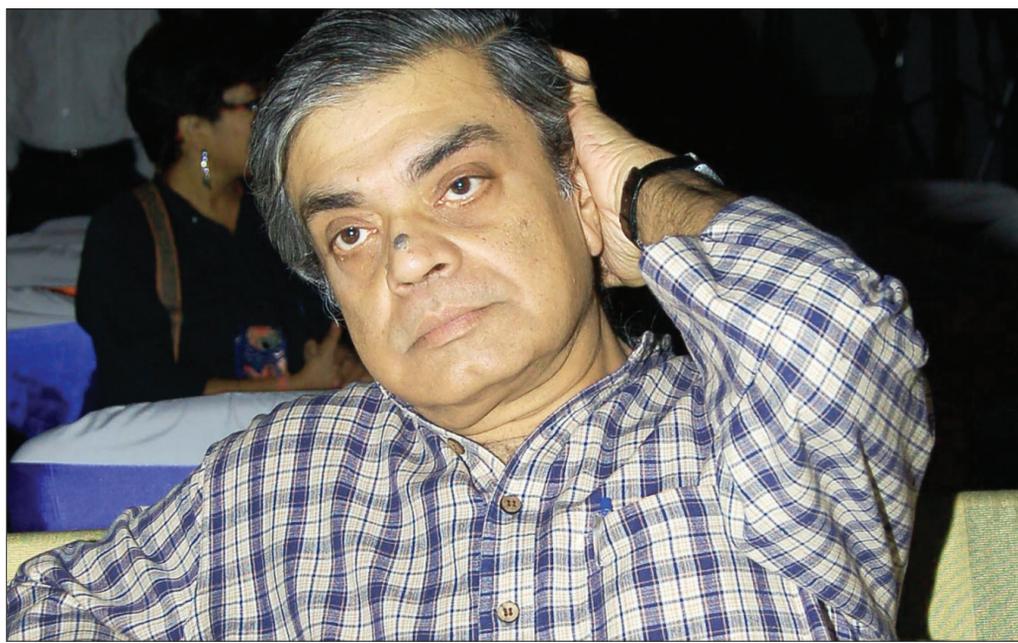
The universality of Feluda is unfailing

By Sayandeb Chowdhury

Sandip Ray has always battled the distinction of being the only son of a world renowned master of cinema. Perhaps it goes to the skewed and myopic understanding of culture in this part of the world that considers the son of a world master blessed with similar distinctions. But Sandip Ray, a Bhadrolok to boot, has handled the pressures of such absurd expectation in spite of being in the same sphere of art as his legendary father. And his calibre and confidence as a filmmaker only gains in strength from the fact that he has successfully been able to hold on to the franchise of Feluda.

So the success of the latest Feluda *Gorosthane Sabdhan* pleases him no end. "I am very happy with the reports and the feedback. We are just into the second week and already the trends are very heartening." For most, the latest Feluda outing is as good as *Bombaiyer Bombete*, the first Feluda that Sandip Ray made for the big screen. "Yes, that's one comparison that makes me feel proud. See, when *Bombaiyer Bombete*, was released, the fact of Feluda's return was itself a box office draw. The novelty factor was there. And people wanted to see how we had managed to contemporise him, without trivialising his intelligence and his acumen. But since then, the novelty factor has obviously been secondary to the plot and making of the film. That people have taken that into account and have flocked to the films again and again is a fact I am very thankful about."

Franchise is not a popular thing in India. We have inspirations and we have shameless imitations. At best we do official remakes. In the West, the franchise idea is in custody of the gigantic studios who own the rights to superhero and super-animation franchises and they put in every bit of their wealth of resource and reach into churning out franchise movies every summer. If this year we have Batman, the next summer is reserved for James Bond and the third for the Return of Superman. But here without any of those muscles and money and with no producer having the gall of backing a franchise, Ray has managed to make four Feluda films in a span of seven years. Often referred to as Feluda 2.0 to mark the improved technical virtuosity of his series as different



from the two Feluda films made by his father, Sandip Ray has nevertheless managed to get both critical and popular acclaim for his Feluda series. His biggest strength in the remake is to have given Feluda a touch of contemporariness without making eye-popping changes in the script and texture of the stories. Such changes, he insists may not have sat well with the average Bengali audiences retention of the stories written and set during late sixties and early seventies.

"It took me twenty years to convince a producer to bring back Feluda to the big screen. Amazing. They claimed that there is no demography for films like that. Children enjoy different kind of movies and adult viewers want the usual song and dance routine. What is a film where there is not even women, leave glamour. I failed to impress upon them the universality of Feluda. Finally, it was Ramoji Rao, a Telegu producer who came ahead to produce a Feluda film. I believe the Bengali professionals working at his facility in Hyderabad impressed upon him the need to make a Feluda film." But now there must be a

queue outside his house of producers because all his Feluda films have been able to return the money to the producer. "Oh yes", Ray says with a smile. "Now there is virtually a queue. Someone even suggested I made two Feluda films a year. Tell me is that possible. Making a Feluda film is not easy. The locations have to be spot on. Readers remember the minutest details from his stories. A bad Feluda film will bring in the usual first week viewers but then if they found out that it's a bad film, you had it. It will tank at the box office and I will stand with not one but multiple guns pointed at me for messing with cultural heritage", he says with a hearty but sincere laugh. "I cannot afford to do a bad Feluda film. I have to give in my best. That's why I have decided to do a Feluda film every alternate year."

So it means that the next Feluda film will be shot next year? And is it the long waited *Joto Kando Kathmandute*? "Well, it will be shot next year so it will only hit theatres the year after. But I am still to take a call between *JKK* and *Royal Bengal Rohosya*, which is a personal favourite. *JKK* is what attracts both me and

Sabyasachi (Chakraborty, who plays Feluda). We have done it before for television. But television is a very limited medium, both financially and in the sense of its scopophilic appeal. Big screen is magic. So we are both keen to do it for the big screen. Let's see. We have to take a call soon."

His Feluda series is more successful but his other outings, though few in number have also been able to attract a lot of attention. From his award winning *Fatikchand* to the complex and eerie *Nishijapon*, Ray has also shown a keen insight into human frailties. And yes, unlike Feluda, his other films do have women in them and sometimes adult themes and even murder and revenge. "I have decided that I will alternate one Feluda with a non-Feluda movie. Change of taste is necessary. And I have various films in mind. Let me see. May be in a couple of months I will be able to announce a new movie."

But Feluda is not his only way to carry on the legacy of his father. Sandip Ray can take the credit for being an archivist par excellence, a practice that has little peers in India or Calcutta. We celebrate

everything, we dote on our cultural pride and response but we manage to retain and preserve very few of it for posterity. Our film reels rot in weeded archives, our artworks scrap away in locked rooms, our music get choked in forlorn chambers. Ray has not allowed the great lived and art heritage of his father go to waste. The Ray society that he has helped found has done a magnificent job in restoring and digitizing most of the paperwork — the posters, cards, publicity material, screenplays and the delightful *kheror khata*, his father's personal, artistic diary." I am happy with the work done till now. I am blessed to have a few involved and gifted people who have come together to help me in this endeavour. Almost the entire paperwork has been archived. Now his books, music and stuff are being catalogued. Eventually I want to set up a centre of research on Satyajit Ray. It will contain everything he ever created and there will be ample scope to do research and work on him. But for that we need a lot of logistic support, a reasonably located venue and good funds. In two years time, hopefully, we will be in a position to concretise the plan. But work is on."

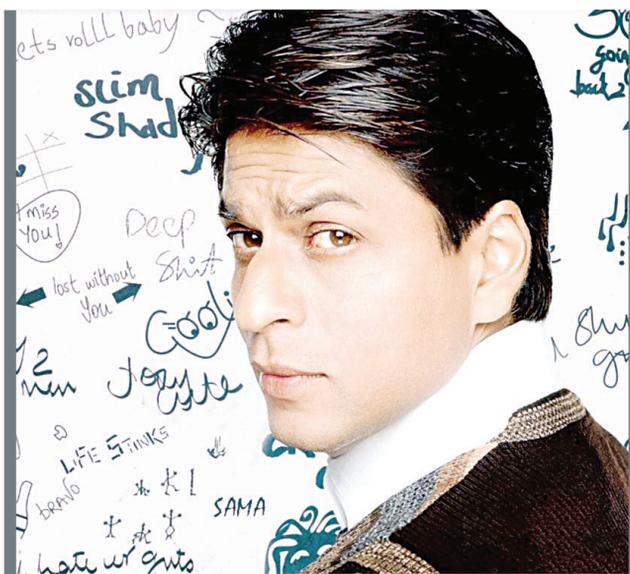
Though his father's work is in safe hands, another family legacy, the family magazine *Sandesh*, he rues, is a bit neglected. "I am not able to spend the amount of time on *Sandesh* that I would like to. I am very unhappy about the fact that *Sandesh* has not been able to get back to its pre-eminent position. But running a magazine is a tough job and I wish I had more time in my hand for *Sandesh*."

He saw Feluda taking birth in the hands of his father in the great filmmaker's famous room in Bishop Lefroy Road and since Feluda has been with him, and has now taken a life of its own in his own hands. Sandip Ray feels responsible for the fate of Feluda and the ace detective is his best preoccupation among many others. "I wish Sabyasachi stays fit for at least two more Feluda films. He is the only one who can do justice to the role. But he has to stay fit. We are all growing old but unlike me, unlike us, he can still be seen on screen. So he has to keep fit and fine. If he does so, I am sure we can do two more Feluda films together."

We wish too. Because like Feluda, we would never want to grow old. Never. And Sandip Ray is one who can ensure that we don't.

interview

newsmakers



Bangla Blues

As the owner of Kolkata Knight Riders, the IPL dud, Shahrukh Khan almost adopted Bengali culture and his catchment area included Bangladesh. But his starchy hurry to become an insider all too soon has landed him in a soup. Khan recently visited Bangladesh for a stage show with a B-town brigade consisting of Arjun Rampal, Rani Mukerji, Esha Koppikhar and Dia Mirza. During the tour, the star allegedly smoked in front of the TV cameras and surrounding people, which is completely against the Bangladeshi law. He is also said to have been overbearing in availing VVIP treatment at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka. He does not enjoy any such privilege in any of the countries in the world, including his own country. Perhaps the Bangladeshi authorities were overawed, or perhaps he threw his weight around in a small country after being harassed in a bigger one (remember his airport 'tribulation' in USA?), we cannot be sure. The media there hasn't minced words to react to Khan's antics.

A Bangladeshi newspaper called SRK the "King of vulgarity". It says the sentiments of Bangladeshi people are deeply hurt, as Khan clearly showed no respect to the nation. Khan's 'look I am the victim' act in USA couldn't do much for *My Name Is Khan*'s box office fate. Now we are curious how his arrogant act in Bangladesh affects his forthcoming flick *Ra.One*. Is he a Hancock-like dark, give-a-damn, bad-boy superhero in the film?



Criminals stand up

Insulted and humiliated Union Home Minister P Chidambaram says, "... nevertheless crime takes place because Delhi attracts a large number of migrants. There are a large number of unauthorised colonies. And these migrants who settle in the city's north-west colonies carry a kind of behaviour which is unacceptable in any modern city. So crimes do take place." This in the context of an 18-year-old girl getting gang raped on Sunday in a moving car. The reaction does more than conveying a banal attempt to shrug responsibility for the degradation of law and order. It makes as aware that Raj Thackeray brand of xenophobia and elitism is not really mutually exclusive with a Harvard-bred student's 'grand vision' of things! Perhaps his bold rhetoric of liberalization, opening up, and free mobility of means of production doesn't apply to the wretched laborers! Chidambaram is talking about the same 'carcinogenic' area that irks the Maratha demagogue to no end: Bihar and U.P, along with West Bengal and Bangladesh in Delhi's case. Parties like Lalu Yadav-led RJD, SP and BJP created a furor to corner Chidambaram's major slip of tongue! But this news-worthy reaction is not entirely benign. In local lexicon, the migrant laborers of these areas are the

"Purvanchalis", a community of extremely poor slum-dwellers. They make for a sizeable vote-bank. No wonder Lalu, fresh from a career-threatening electoral defeat, would jump into the fray. Putting the profitable garland of voting rights on these 'Purvanchalis' is enough, none of our busy politicians have the time to follow up on more substantial empowerment for them. Chidambaram, like a fool, broke the golden, convenient silence. Under pressure, he recanted the statement. As Chidambaram and other politicians went into this news-making spree, the migrant laborers continue living the same way they always did. For all the news' sake!

Coach factory



Confused? Thinking this may be some diasporic culture-factory or a first-world-serves-third world NGO perhaps? We give you the connection. In sports, as in politics, a team on a losing streak makes the concerned administrators look for someone new at the helm of that team. Australian cricket team has been a pale shadow of the formidable side it used to be, and Mohun Bagan, India and Bengal's popular football club has won nothing this season. And this triggered the ancient desire of seeing heads roll among the decision-makers in both these sporting bodies. Mohun Bagan authority came out the more ruthlessly efficient in this front. They compelled their Goan coach Staley Rosario to resign, and guess who they appointed as the technical director for the team? Subhas Bhowmick, a successful foot-

baller-turned successful coach-turned a hounded bribe-stealer. This man has been appointed and sacked and appointed and sacked a number of times. A master in making controversial statements, it is now this man's turn to act the messiah again!

Dont' say we didn't Warn you

Talking about controversies and Shane Warne jumps to mind. The Australian media talked about the legendary leg-spinner as a possible replacement for the out-of-favour captain Ricky Ponting of the struggling Australian team, to resurrect their Ashes fortune against old foes England. Warne, an extremely successful player, never got the chance to be the captain of Australia, despite possessing a shrewd cricketing brain, because of his dissipated life-style and oceanic libido! Deep into retirement, among other things, he probably wanted to quash the rumours of a captaincy call by enthralling the world with another round of libidinal excess. He is said to be getting real cosy with British model and actress Liz Hurley, who may or may not be divorced from her husband. But the



Australian selectors (headed by the maverick Greg Chappell) don't seem to be perceptive enough. The last time Warne was caught on the camera romping with two Kiwi models, he followed it up with a five-wicket haul for Hampshire, the English County he played for. Who knows, a Hurley-happy Warne may have tormented England. Which would have meant one British conquest after another!

Contributed by Jaya Biswas, Agnibho Gangopadhyay

india today



© globalcartoonist.com. No reproduction without permission