fter 27 years and Satyajit Ray's Pather Panchall, the next Indian film to win an award (Prix du Jury) at the Cannes International Film Festival was Kharij (1983) by Mrinal Sen. the acknowledged maverick of the New Indian ctnema. Then came Khandhar (in Hindi, starring Shabana Azmi and Nasiruddin Shah), clearly a more ambitions film than his other earlier films in that language - Bhuban Shome, EK Adhuri Kahani and Mrigaya, each significant in its own way. By this time Scn. the angry young-old director, was entering a new phase of creativity. albeit much to the dismay of his early admirers. He was spurned by many who soon saw him as a "renegade", suddenly

refusing to submit his cinematic talents to the compulsions of ideological interpreta tion of social reality. In their eyes. khary and khandhar marked a clear drift from the angry view of life as posited in the three films. Interview. Calcutta 71 and Chorus — all done in the early seventies. Cinematically speaking. though, both Interview and Chorus suffered in patches from overstated visual and verbal predilections, while Calcutta 71 was even more limited in terms of artistic credibility and value and perhaps only served as a rude reminder that extra artistic purposes sought to be achieved through art more often than not tended to defeat its own end. Happily. Sen himself seemed to realise sooner than his admirers of this genre that these films did little more than reflect the film-maker's preoccupation with the propagation of socio-political ideas, in the process of which the medium became the massage.

Chorus, however, had also marked the slow beginning of a conscious act of balancing the norms of imaginative art

From page 9 having a cup of coffee when heard on my walkie-talkie that a senior Somali colleague. Haroun Abrar, had been shot in the head while resisting a hijacking attempt in a town called Qortoley He was not as lucky as the Finnish man. He was shot at point-blank range and part of his skull and brain had been blown away. I rushed to the hospital, which was a hospital only in name. There was no electricity and the feeble generator could barely provide enough power to light up the operating room. There was no blood, no oxygen, no medicine, and no diagnostic or life-support medical equipment. An appeal had been made over the walkie-talkie network for blood and oxygen, and many people who heard the appeal braved the possibility of being killed on the way as they sought safe routes to come to the hospital to donate blood. Despite all the valiant efforts into the night, little could be done in Mogadishu if Haroun were to have even a fighting chance of survival. The next morning, he was evacuated to Nairobi by a private plane. He never regained con-

sciousness and died weeks later. By mid-December, most of the expatriates had left, the houses in my neighbourhood were empty and their generators stlent. The Somalts, who were also victims of the lawlessness and random violence. retreated behind closed doors. The shops began to close early and the streets were practically deserted in the evening. The activities of my office had come to a virtual halt and the few of us who remained. worked listlessly. And the civil war started to close in on Mogadishu. The international organizations decided to further trim their staff to only one or two per agency. I managed to keep two in addition to mysclf. I was still hoping that there would be a political solution and everyone would return after the Christmas holi-

On 29 December, I went to the routine inter-agency security meeting at the UNDP office. Faced with a common concern, a spirit of brotherhood had developed among the few that remained. The night before, there was an attack on the UNDP compound and an intense fire-fight had taken place. The police guarding the compound were literally out of ammunition when the bandits decided to retreat. I hadn't noticed the bullet marks on the walls when I went in but could not help noticing them on my way out. It was early afternoon. As I called my two colleagues on the walkie-talkie and asked them to meet me at my house which was every close to our office, I noticed that the shops were all closed and the streets were fairly deserted. My colleagues had already reached my house and as we were about to sit down for lunch, there was a loud boom of heavy artillery, followed by bursts of machine-gun fire. We ate in silence and barely noticed what we ate or when we finished. The gunfire continued and I asked my colleagues and my two maid to return to their homes. That was the last time I saw the maids. As

Mrinal Sen:

Every Moment I Put Myself in the Dock'

A Star Special by Samir Dasgupta

and politico-didactic points of view that were meant to stirrevolutionary urges. The trend was clearer in Padatik, a film which probed with loving care and considerable artistic insight the questionings of a Naxalite activist, thereby exploring and encompassing the raison d'etre of the whole movement as well as the sense of self-defeat which ultimately pervaded the political scenario of West Bengal and some other regions of India at the time.

The mind of the protagonist as an individual was seen as a multidimensional thing. What remains significant, however, is that Padatik stirred only a segment of the left-minded inteiligentsia, while it left the general run of film-buffs cold. The reason lay in the fact that the film explored not any aspect of the daily life and aspirations of the common Indian man, but the abstract aspirations and high idealism of a small segment of the middle class. By contrast, his next film, Mirgaya, which was structurally uneven and lacking in the kind of artistic equilibrium achieved in Padatik, succeeded nevertheless in evoking a much wider popular response, precisely because it dwelt on the anti-imperialist ethos of the nation and eschewed the abstract plane of interpretation while showing

the common man's sufferings and struggles. Yet the film made its maker more acutely aware than before of the hiatus between the reaction of the intelligentsia and the ordinary film fans towards his treatment of themes that blended the private feelings, acts and

'When I look back, I don't do so for any nostalgic kick. Neither have I any emotional involvement with the past. I simply look back."

thoughts of individuals with the dimensions of impersonal thoughts and behaviour.

Ekdin Pratidin (1979) marked a major turning point in Sen's creative process. Known for his persistent obsession with political themes, Sen was suddenly seen by many as one who was mellowing down and becoming increasingly introspective, as in Kharij (1982) and Khandhar (1984), a charge quickly denied by the director who chose to describe the new phase as a "logical and inevitable extension" of his past. In reality. Sen's original moorings in the

generalised theme of class struggle now convinced him to take a closer look at himself. His camera focused on middle class values and resulted in a moving portrayal of complex human relationships in the contemporary social context.

Faced with an implicit criticism. Sen had to do a lot of explaining to justify his belief that the process of self-analysis and self-criticism was essential to a correct perception of the social reality. "You will see in all my recent films like Ekdin Paratidin. Aakaler Sandhane and Kharij," he said in an interview published in June. 1983, "that I have analysed myself. There is not only selfcriticism, but also criticism of my neighbours, the milieu around me. Judging on the basis of all this, if anybody says

have deviated from contemporary politics, my anger has calmed down, then I have nothing to say in reply. When I look back, I don't do so for any nostalgic kick. Neither have I any emotional involvement with the past. I simply look back. I see a galaxy of known faces, I see many incidents. I weave them, making a pattern. There comes out a real world of which I'm no more an inhabitant. Then comes the realisation that we. the middle class people, are all some sort of deserters and

outcastes I have been talking about self-criticism and Khary is its intense and merciless manifestation. Every moment I put myself in the dock while I was making the film. I accused myself all the while, and I am still doing it. I was convicting myself, the milieu in which I live, and the entire middle class society. One of my old and sensitive friends told me that for sometime, particularly after making Ekdin Pratidin. I have been castigating my own class in the name of self-criticism. It's true. I'm trying to face myself. making an honest attempt at self-purification. I can say in clear terms that I'm not one of those who benefit from the games of their class and, at the same time, always try to discard their class. Our middle class has always played a vital role in the formation of the economic structure of our present day society and this role is indispensable for a society which is passing through a transition. I have denied the never phenomenon. I am an active member of the middle class society. So when I confront myself, I feel the presence of the entire middle class sentiment within me. Then I put questions to myself. I argue with myself, I ostracise myself. I analyse myself and try to rectify the faults. Through this process I am transformed

Here I mean my entire class. Kharij is a document of such transformation.... Somebody asked me - and this is the question of other people also why I don't project contemporary political issues through my films..... (But) are those that I speak about insignificant? Are those not a part of the great struggle? Is there no social or political significance in my other films? Moreover, what I was doing and am continuing to do through films like Kharij can never reach a conclusion

is matter of realisation." If this excerpted version of the director's exegesis of his post-Parashuram (1978) phase is not to be dismissed as mere rationalisation of what many

what are we to read in it between the lines? Sen's films - Ekdin Pratidin onwards have failed to touch a large section of Bengali cinegoers for the simple reason that what these people look for in a

have seen as "escapism," then

through arguments because it

movie is either "drama" perse or, on a different plane of experience, "excitement" punched with a visible message". The explicitly political films Sen made during the best part of he seventies were hailed, among others, by this section of cinegoers, albeit for the wrong reason that excitement was blended with a clear visible message.

This, to be sure, is the section which just does want to search for a

message. Reacting sharply to a suggestion (during an interview soon after his Khandhar (1984) was released) that he was escaping "political issues" altogether. Mrinal Sen shot back: "What are the political issues you are referring to? Land reform?

Class struggle? I ask you a simple question: Do you think what I am doing these days does in any way negates the broader political issues? I do not think it does. I think all this helps you to sharpen your vision and your ability to take up the issues you think of."

Whether the answer satisfied either his admirers or his detractors is another question.

· Kharij. Sen's last film in Bengalt, is already eight years behind

The now not-so-angry - young-man of the new Indian cinema is currently back on the road with his crew shooting his latest Bengali feature which seeks to link the confusing dialectics of the changing history in East Europe (pulling down of the Berlin Wall and reunification of the two Germanys amidst euphoria and fears) with an intensely psychological domestic drama arising in the dingy backstreets of north Calcutta.

In fact, Sen began shooting Antweshti (The Funeral) - now renamed Mahaprithibi - on 5 October, 1990, the day the two Germanys reunited. How does Sen propose to deal with this braintwisting theme? All that may be gathered from his

so far is that the film seeks to "capture the world in a capsule in a typical middle

various disjointed statements

class family." A Book on Green Revolution

by US-Based Dhaka Author

HE book, titled "Invest ment Opportunities, Household Sa-vings and Rates of Return on Investment : A Case Study of the Green Revolution in Bangladesh" is due to be published soon in the United States by the University Press of America. Inc (4720 Boston Way, Lanham, MD 20706, USA). It author: Prof. Abdullah Shibli, a national of Bangladesh, a former teacher at the University of Dhaka, who is now an Assistant Professor of Business Administration at Stonehill College, N. Eastton, MA. Earlier, Dr Shibli was a doctoral fellow at the International Food Policy Research

Institute, Washington DC. In a forward to the book, a 159-page hardback cover publication, Prof. Gustav F. Papaneck, Professor of Economics, Boston University says, "A major contribution on the relationship between technological change, and specifically the adoption of the HYV package. and savings Dr. Shibli



Prof. Abdullah Shibli

points out the implications for government policy an important contribution to our understanding of the functioning of agricultural households in Bangladesh and, by implication, elsewhere in South Asia."

Introduction of the new seed-fertilizer-irrigation tech nology (the high-yielding variety, or HYV technology) brought about the Green Revolution in the peasant economies of South Asia. This book explores the impact of the Green Revolution on the economic behavior of farmers in Bangladesh.

Prof. Shibli analyzes the relationship between technological change and farm savings. He uses household survey data from rural Bangladesh and finds that household savings increased after farmers adopted the new technology.

The book also includes a fascinating compárison of returns from productive investment, land speculation, moncylending and usufructuary mortgage.

The book discusses the agricultural policy of the government of Bangladesh and different options to utilize the immense potential hidden in the farm sector and the innovative peasants.

Escape from Terror

evening fell and the sound of the azan calling the Muslim faithful to prayers wafted hauntingly from distant mosques, the guns gradually fell silent. But is was only a momentary respite. I imagined the rebels and the army were taking time off to plead their case with Allah and each side was trying to convince the Almighty of the righteousness of its cause. Strangely enough, for the first time, I felt a sense of relief, reckoning that with the fighting going on between two armies, bandits would not venture out. I slept fitfully that night as sounds of sudden explosions or gunfire kept waking me up.

By 31 December, it was quite clear that contrary to the claim of the government, the rebel siege of the capital was far from repelled. It could last a long time and I realised that I might find myself in the midst of biter house-to-house fighting. I had every little water left and some dry ration which would not last very long. I had neither eaten nor slept properly for three days. Lack of food and steep, on top of the mental stress made me forget that it was already New Year's Eve. I had not stepped out of the house since the fighting began. Besides being, foolhardy, there was nowhere to go. I had tried to watch some of the television shows my wife had videotaped in the States but found the make-believe violence less than comforting. must have dozed off just before midnight when all of a sudden there was a deafening noise of explosions from every direction. Startled and frightened, I crouched in the most protected corner of my house and turned on the walkie-talkie. I couldn't believe it as I heard my fellow expatriates exchanging New Year's greetings. I too sheepishly joined in. I couldn't tell if the outburst of fire power was to usher in a New Year or the final assault by one side to overwhelm the other. I must have fallen asleep in the midst of all this, for when I opened my eyes I could see

to prayers. It was New Year's Day, 1991. It wasn't long before the guns were also awake. The heavy artillery was ponderous, less frequent but very loud. Sometimes my solid house would shake and I could even smell the cordite. From the sound of the explosions and the reports on the walkietalkies, I could mentally pinpoint the locations where the fighting was most intense. The American embassy was not in the battle zone, but that was small consolation since looting had already started and the American embassy was the choicest of plums. The diplomats were trapped inside the embassy and the social club of the Marines. I wondered if the handful of Marines would be able to keep the well-armed looters at bay until a rescue attempt was mounted. Although the shelling seldom stopped, it appeared that neither side had the better of the

other.

that it was getting light and

hear the faint sound of the call

At mid-morning, I received a coded massage from the sccurity coordinator, whose call sign was Alpha, that it has been decided that the remaining UN personnel will make an attempt to escape as soon as the small charter plane was readted. He asked me to be at his house by noon. Sweeter words had not been spoken on the walkie-talkie since Alexander Graham Bell first threw his voice with the aid of his new-fangled gadget ! But welcome as the decision was, carrying it out was fraught with danger. Since early morning, there were numerous reports of vehicles attempting to use the roads but being commandeered by soldiers and the occupants killed at whim. Far

from having diplomatic immu-

'I must have dozed off just before midnight when all of a sudden there was a deafening sound of explosions from every direction. Startled frightened, crouched in the most protected corner of may house and turned on the walkietalkie.

nity, vehicles belonging to expatriates were even more vulnerable since it was a safe bet that an expatriate vehicle did not carry men armed to the teeth. We were soft targets and likely to be profitable ones too because every Somali believed that we had huge amounts of hard currency and other valu-

The pilot and crew of our plane somehow made it to the airport, flying a huge white flag. They reported safe arrival and that the plane was ready. I wondered if I should tell my faithful driver right away or wait until an expatriate colleague came to pick me up. Afuweyne had been up all night also and was probably sleeping in his room. I decided to wait. I began to prepare for the final dash. I put on ordinary, comfortable clothes and canvas running shoes. I packed a small flight bag with a change of clothes, a packet of biscuits and a bottle of water. I decided against taking anything of value or anything too heavy, in case I had to run from my

The sound of fighting continued intermittently. After what seemed like eternity, my colleague arrived to pick me up. Asuweyne was either sleeping in the annex or had gone out. I called his name halfheartedly a couple of times. I did not know how I could say goodbye to him. It was better that I left without looking into his eyes. The car, flying a UN flag, gingerly moved out of the residential area, darted across a major road and got on to another road. There were no

other cars or vehicles. Only streams of people on foot, heading away from the city.

They walked silently, and curiously looked at our car as we drove down the middle of the

We were furtively watching them to see if anyone was raising a gun in our direction when we noticed a pick-up truck carrying half a dozen armed men heading towards us from the opposite direction.

We held our breath as the distance between the two vehicles shrank. The men only waved at us as we passed.

Alpha opened the gate when we reached his house. He looked haggard from days and nights of listening to endless reports from all the walkie-talkie holders. As security coordinator, it was his job to receive the bad news and offer whatever little advice or reassurance he could. As we waited for the others to arrive, the walkie-talkies kept bringing news of bombing here, an explosion there and the sound of small arms fire everywhere. Suddenly, the walkie-talkies fell silent. What we had dreaded finally happened. We lost our only means of communication with the pilots at the airport and other colleagues.

We had no idea if it was only a malfunction or someone had destroyed the booster station. It was such a helpless feeling. We decided to head for the airport as soon as everyone had assembled. The convoy of three cars flying UN flags drove through the back streets of the residential area where real fighting had not yet reached. People were standing outside their gates talking. As we passed, they looked at us wistfully and a few even gave us a wan smile. At the airport, the soldiers saluted us as our cars raced toward the hanger. It was four O'clock and the sun had begun to mellow. The Cessna 208 looked tiny, parked outside the hangar in the empty airport. The pilot gave the thumbs-up sign and the eight passengers clambered in. We fastened our seat belts and the pilots began their pre-flight check. It seemed too easy and proved too good to be true. Incredibly, the immigration and customs people wanted us to complete the departure formalities. They took our passports to put the exit stamps. We had to pay the departure tax. They went back and forth between the aircrast and the terminal building, walking deliberately slowly, squeezing the last ounce of perverse joy out of harassing the foreigners leaving the Somalis to their fate. As we sat strapped in our seats, we watched two Mig fighter planes circling over the part of the town held by the rebels. It dawned on us that the airport could again be a target of attack. Our plane was a sitting duck. It took an hour and a half

before the departure proce-

dures as well as the officers

satisfied to give the final clearance for our plane to take off. It was half past five and the

themselves were sufficiently

sun was disappearing over the horizon as the pilot cautiously positioned the aircraft on the runway. He revved the engines, the little plane shook mightily and began to move as fast as its wheels could carry it. On both sides of the runway, we could see soldiers setting up gun emplacements. The pilot pulled back the stick and banked the plane sharply over the ocean, moving as fast and as far away as possible from the doomed city and country. closed my eyes and fell asleep. I was tired, very tired.

• The writer, a national of Bangladesh, was the Deputy Representative of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Somalia, when the African country was caught in the political turmoil described in his article. Mr Zaman who is currently on leave from UNHCR had previously served in Geneva, New York, Malaysta and Thailand. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily represent the views of UNHCR.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita.

We were so much in love when we got married. What happened now is we hardly talk to each other. He is busy with his business and earns a lot of money. I occupy myself with the children, family, in-laws etc. We never have a conversation except when there is an important family decision to be made. It makes me very sad sometimes. Is it too late to do something about it? I feel dejected, isolated and bored.

> Shamina, Eskaton Garden, Dhaka.

Dear Shamina

Your case is a classic example of what happens to many marriges when it is not taken care of. It takes time, effort and care to build an interesting, supportive and loving relationship. It also needs nurturing. Good marriages are made and does not "just happen". Start to talk to your husband about these issues. Seek his support, show him that you care. Maybe he does too, but cannot express himself. Go back to where you began and slowly come forward, you will perhaps find out how this problem started.

Dear Mita,

I am the only child of my parents and therefore live with them with my husband. We have had to listen to tounts and criticisms from familia member. People say my hust and is not capable of looking after his family so he keeps were with his in-laws. We have been married for only 2 years but this is creating friction between us and sometimes he wants to leave. My parents get very upset whenever we talk of leaving, what should I do? Please advise.

Suma, Chittagong.

Dear Suma,

When men live with their in-laws they are called "Ghar Jamai" and ridiculed. When women live with their in-laws they are called the ideal "Bou". This is the way it has been in our society for a long time. You are being pulled from both directions. I would suggest that if your parents are not too old and do not need constant looking after and if you can afford to live independently then you should think of leaving. It might be painful for them but will work out better in the long run.

Dear Mita.

My mother-in-law is very young energetic and friendly. We get along well but sometimes her energy and friendliness

creates problems. She insists on visiting my friends with me and sits in the living room whenever they come to my house. What should I do, how can I make her stop without hurting

Anonymous, Dhaka.

Dear Anonymous,

her feelings?

I am sure you realize how lucky you are to have a motherin-law who is young, energetic and friendly instead of an old, sickly, nagging, interfering one. The problem you mention can be mildly annoying and there are ways of getting around it without hurting her feelings. Meet your friends in someone else's house, invite them over on days when she is away. I am sure you can manage to get together with your friends without her being present.

Dear Mita,

What can I do about servant problems? I have changed so many over the past few years. They are mean, ungrateful and dishonest. My children and husband never help in the house so there is always a lot of work, otherwise I would really not have any servants. Is there a way out of this situation?

> Shireen, Purana Paltan, Dhaka.

Dear Shireen,

There is really no way out of this problem. You will have to live with their ungratefulness, meanness, dishonesty as they live with our eccentricities. One of the problem is that we do not recognize that they are as human as we are and have similar desires, wants and aspirations. Their problem is because of the way life has treated them, they cannot trust anyone. Does it make sense at all? If it does then see if you can act on it. It will not be easy.

Run by a trained and experienced Family and Marriage counsellor, assisted by a professional team of doctor, psychologist and lawyer, this column will answer questions relating to family, marriage, health, family laws, and social and interpersonal relationships. Please address letters to Mita, The Daily Star. GPO Box 3257 or to 28/1. Toynbee Circular Road, Motifheel, Dhaka-1000.