

KALIDAS KARMAKAR In Quest of the Ultimate

By Fayza Haq

Kalidas Karmakar who stirred up the Bangladeshi art world with his fiery imagination in the National Exhibition of 1975 and '76 has today, in the 90s taken the Chinese and Japanese art enthusiasts by storm. Kalidas's 132 pieces at the International Exhibition Hall at Beijing and Gallery Nagar at Tokyo cried out boldly for attention and admiration.

Always restless and flamboyant Kalidas in his 'Holy Symbols' had created mystifying images with materials like mud, wood, metal, cloth and fibre. These appeared like overwhelming trophies to celebrate the innate struggle of mankind. Hopes, anguish and poignancy were blended with pulsating impetus to strive and survive.

"When trekking past primitive villages in the Himalayas during my holiday, I confronted the simple country style worship of the local gods. This was with sticks and stones and a few grains of coloured cereals. I've converted into symbolic images and brought into my work," the artist explained.

As Patricia Godsell had once commented "Kalidas paints from the heart rather than from the head." His series of water colours, mixed media, collages, serigraphs and pen and ink graphics have one dominating factor: the supreme confidence of the use of the line, which pulsates with vigour and rhythm of

their own. These animated lines seek answers and are sensitive to time and space.

The artist's works spill over with symbols, such as the eye in his recent and past exhibitions. In them he draws in nostalgia, mystery, and local traditions, with his inimitable style that is remarkable for its eye for details.

None of Kalidas's creations that have recently travelled to China, Japan, Los Angeles, Milan and Rome over the last five years, were created with the initial intentions of pleasing the eye. These days for an artist to paint beautiful things are over. I find it difficult to look at the moon and the sky and present them as conventional concepts of beauty."

After his sojourn in South East Asia, which includes Korea, Kalidas is now bound for a "walkabout" in the principal cities of Australia—Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne—taking with him his slides of folk art

as seen on the back of Dhaka rickshaws.

"Some people like having villas in the Riviera or penthouses in New York. My ambition is to travel and see the world," the painter confides.

Talking about Bangladeshi paintings Kalidas commented "The theatre and contemporary art in Bangladesh deserve accolades. The artists have been inspired by the Language Movement and the Liberation of '71. They have swept aside the cobweb ridden British India hangups. But one cannot say the same for artists in neighbouring India who delve repeatedly into folklore for inspiration at all times."

Speaking about the prospects of the younger generation the artist believed "The young artists have more scope to express their talent than did the painters of the earlier generation. Their approach to their subject is naturally more modern". Kalidas lamented



Kalidas Karmakar with noted contemporary Indian painter M.F. Hussain.



Self-portrait.

the fact that there were not many places to exhibit in Bangladesh just as there were not enough theatre stages. For a country that is known for its culture it is a shame, he comments, that there is no national gallery. "Galleries and theatres," he pointed out, "are vital for establishing the national identity. Why must continue to depend on the benevolence of the Alliance Francaise or the British Council?"

Touching on the subject of the scarcity of art materials in

Bangladesh Kalidas continues his tirade on the existing state of affairs. "The privileged and well-to-do can spend lakhs of Taka on the ownership of luxury items like cars. Why cannot a fraction of this squandered finances and abundance of purchasing power be spared for a gallery and for art materials for needy artists? Tax free paints could well be introduced by the government to deserving artists in their policy to inculcate a better standard of art, the true symbol of our life and living."

Discussing contemporary art in Western Europe the artist remarked, "Just because contemporary western art has been popularised this does not mean that Europe and USA have artist of finer quality. We fail to muster up adequate promotion. The west can boast of industrialization and materials progress. But we too have art and culture such as that of Mainamati that harks back to many centuries."

Kalidas believes that the reason why Sattajit Rai and Mrinul Sen have won acclaim abroad is not only due to their integral ability and unquestioned genius but because they have been fortunate enough to acquire international publicity.

Dwelling on the prerequisites that go into the making of a good artist Kalidas remarked, "For creation you don't need a degree. The great artists of the past did not need



Image, Mixed media, 1958.

essarily go to the famous art schools, although undoubtedly they must have sat at the feet of famed artists in turn. Just as getting a Ph.D. in literature does not make you a poet or a dramatist so a degree in Fine Arts can only ensure you a safe

job of a sort but little else." Born in Faridpur in 1946, Kalidas has gone a long way to study the paintings of the white settlers Downunder and the magic of the mysterious paintings of dots and dashes of the Aborigines.

THE autobiographies of eminent persons are always useful for many reasons. Irrespective of discipline, the biographies of such personalities are full of certain thing which if properly recorded in the form of books would serve the tremendous purpose of not only the future and today's younger generations, but also make the task of future historians much easier.

A nation can take pride and get encouraged from the lives of its distinguished citizens if they have much literature to know about them. Unfortunately our readers are being deprived of such an important arena of knowledge since long. However, very recently few personalities having commendable contributions in their respective fields have come out to fill in the gap. One such personality is Principal Shafiqur Rahman.

Principal Rahman, who was my colleague at Rajshahi college (1951-56), arriving at the age of 89, has shown a rare courage to leave behind the footprints of his long and dedicated career as a professional economist and educationist for the present and future generations. Only the other day on the 17th January, 1991, Principal Shafiqur Rahman (along

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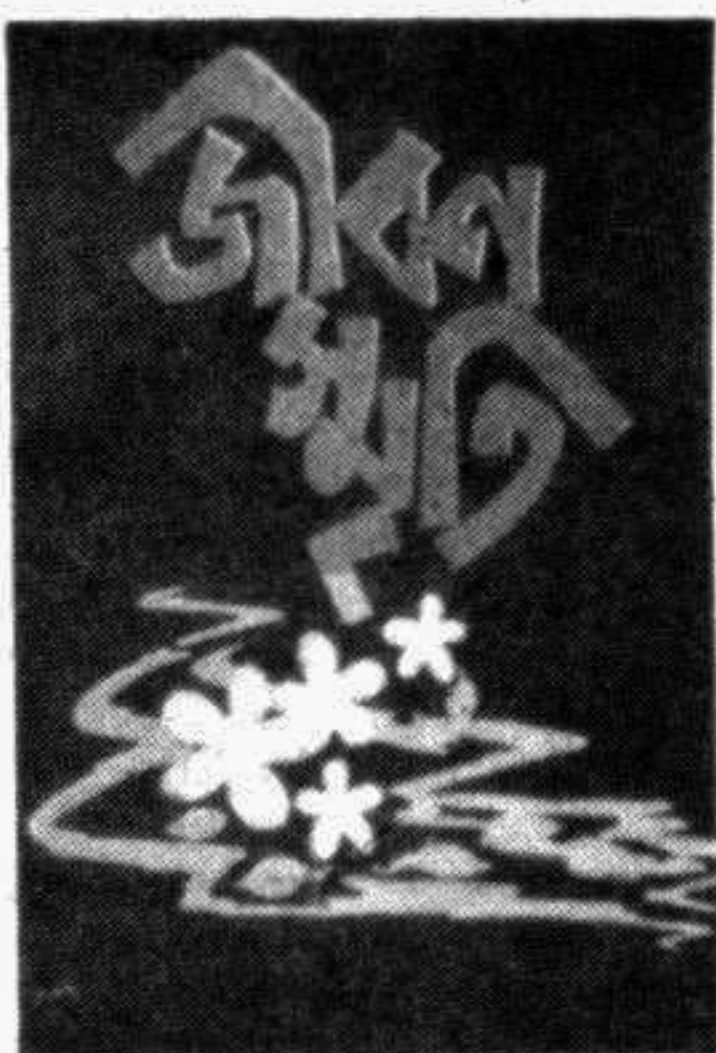
JIBON SMRITI
(Autobiography of Principal Shafiqur Rahman)
Edited by Shishir K. Deb, Pages 215, Price Tk.115

Review by Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui

Book Review

with three other scholars) was honoured as 'Distinguished Economist' of the country for his outstanding contribution in the field of Economics at the Biennial Conference of Bangladesh Economic Association—An Association with which Principal Rahman has been associated since its birth after the independence of Pakistan in 1947. This is perhaps a rare occasion not for Principal Rahman alone but also for us all, because we, as a nation, very often fail to recognise the contribution of our eminent personalities at least in their lifetime.

Beginning from his childhood, Principal Rahman has



depicted his student life, teaching life, participation in different economic conferences at

home and abroad, foreign tour including visit to religious places, family life and critical views on some issues of national importance systematically in ten chapters. One may or may not find some of the views acceptable, for views are author's personal. Some of the facts recalled may lack accuracy because of memory gap. But that does, in no way, diminish the value of the book.

The last chapter contains critical reviews of his books on Economics by some scholars of national and international repute. One of the salient features of the book is that it dates back his early life-socio-economic condition of early this century. Non-cooperation Movement of Mahatma Gandhi etc. and extends upto the very recent events like Movement for Democracy in China. It is for this reason that 'Jibon Smriti' deserves a place in the shelves of all concerned, particularly the younger generations.

'Jibon Smriti' has been forwarded by Prof. Kabir Chowdhury, a prominent intellectual of the country and a distinguished student of Principal Shafiqur Rahman in Dhaka College about half a century back from now.

DISPUTE COULD SPELL END OF ARAB CULTURAL INSTITUTE

Perched on the banks of the Seine, the Paris-based Institut du Monde Arabe is an architectural wonder. But inside this centre, opened in 1987 in a joint effort between the French government and a group of Arab states, there is chaos. As Gemini News Service reports, the dispute over French control of the institute and consequent Arab reluctance to pay dues, has already led to drastic cutbacks at the research and cultural centre that serves between 200,000 and 300,000 visitors a year.

—by Rula el-Rifai

THE Paris-based Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA), one of the world's few cultural centres devoted exclusively to the Arab world, is threatened by a shortage of money from its Arab sponsors and allegations of French government intrusion.

The IMA, housed in a stunning facility on the banks of the River Seine, is facing a severe financial crisis because of a lingering dispute over how it should be administered. Arab countries think the French

wield too much influence over the centre and that its activities are partly motivated by French politics.

An architectural masterpiece, IMA is still bubbling with life. Each day hundreds of visitors come to view its museums, to do research in its well-stocked library and documentation centre, to attend different cultural activities or to use its extensive audiovisual facilities.

But the building's glittering exterior of high-technology Arabesque windows—designed to open and close with the light like a mechanical retina—betrays the chaos within.

The centre's equipment is in poor repair and it has suf-

fered badly from budget cuts. Many of its cultural activities have been curtailed. There is barely enough money left in the coffers to pay employee salaries and unions representing IMA workers have already waged strikes.

"We strongly believe that IMA's role is primarily cultural...the experience of the last three years shows us that IMA answers a real need in the general public," the union said in an official statement.

"IMA should stop being subjected to the vicissitudes of interior French policy and Franco-Arab politics," it said.

The Gulf war has added another dimension to the confusion about the future of the

institution which was originally backed by more than a dozen Arab states including Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The war has exacerbated Arab mistrust of French intentions and rumours abound about plans to transform the institute's unique Arab identity.

In October, the French-appointed IMA President, Edgar Pisani, announced a series of austerity measures for the next two years to get the centre's finances under budget. That will mean eliminating the music department and the documentation centre's as well as cutting 37 jobs.

Despite a series of rotating strikes, Pisani has refused to back off on his restructuring plans. In February, the Institute was to be closed for two weeks during which major restructuring of its operations would take place. Employees were anxious to see what would be left at the end of the process.

Conceived in 1974 by French President Valerie Giscard d'Estaing, who wanted an institute to promote the Arab culture in France, it got the financial backing of 19 Arab countries in June of 1980.

Institut du Monde Arabe

Paris-based institute in trouble

- Opened in 1987 by Mitterrand
- 50,000 books
- 27,000 square metres of floorspace
- Construction cost over 300m francs
- 230,000 visitors in 1990
- Staff of 193 cut to 156
- Now 150m francs in debt



An Indian-born freelance writer and broadcaster, brought up in Australia, Ms Sujan now works for Radio Nederland at the Hague. She visited Bangladesh during the movement that led to the overthrow of the Ershad regime. She will be writing occasionally for The Daily Star.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,

I have started reading your column with great interest and hope it will continue for a long time. You had once replied to the letter of a middle-aged woman whose husband's behaviour had suddenly changed. I am facing the same problem: only mine seems more serious. Not only does my husband snap and scold for no reason, he has started staying out late, something he never did. I suspect he is keeping bad company as I often receive strange telephone calls. I am getting worried and alarmed. Our marriage was never perfect but we have never faced such a crisis before. Please advise: I do want to save the marriage.

Shameem, Shymoli.

Dear Shameem

You sound very alarmed but did not give me enough information for me to understand the reason. Sudden change of behaviour in a spouse can be very upsetting but there may be many underlying factors which perhaps you have ignored. First of all, have you tried talking to him? No, not in an accusing manner, but as a friend who wants to share the problem and help. You will be surprised to know how many marriages break and couples drift apart due to lack of communication. Try to find the reason for his behaviour. Talk to his friends, try the office and make him take a medical check-up. When you have exhausted all these possibilities and the problem still persists please write to me and I shall be happy to counsel you.

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Dear Mita,

I have a 8-year-old son who goes to one of the local English medium schools. I admit he is restless, at times aggressive, and lacks concentration. I am trying my best to change his behaviour but the school does not help at all. All I hear is complaints about him and threats that next time he does anything wrong he will be thrown out of the school. He never gets any encouragement from his teachers and is always made to feel inferior. This is having a bad psychological impact on him and resulting in further aggressive behaviour. I do not want to change schools as they are all the same. Please advise me as to what I shall do.

Khuku, Malibagh.

Dear Khuku,

I understand and sympathise at your predicament. Our schools are not equipped to handle children who are a little out of the ordinary. As school counselling does not exist. One of the reasons for the teachers' impatience is too many children in the classroom. It is hard for them to give individual attention to all, leave alone problematic children. The school management has to agree with the teachers otherwise the teachers have been known to have threatened to quit. I know you have tried, but try talking to the teacher again and get to the root of the problem. Whatever you do please do not accuse her/him. For yourself, continue to work on your son in modifying his behaviour, give him plenty of time and patience. While most schools are the same I would advise you to look around and talk to headmistresses of schools on their policy with such children.

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Dear Mita

I have been married for 22 years. Looking back I see years of adjustment on my side and very little from the side of my family. I have been always the one to look after the needs of others while nobody ever cared to find out what I wanted. Recently this thought has been bothering me as I realize that I have never done anything for myself. Now that the children have grown and my husband is very well-entrenched in his career, I feel left out and redundant. I feel my life has been a waste and express my frustration by losing my temper, arguing with my husband etc., who I blame for not encouraging me to pursue a career. I realize I am being unpleasant but cannot help it. What should I do? Is it too late to do something worthwhile?

Latifa, Dhanmondi.

Dear Latifa,

I am sure many women will be able to relate to your problem as what you expressed plagues many women when they come to this stage of their lives. Women go through mid-life crisis, when they go through biological and psychological changes.

First let me tell you that if you have raised happy, healthy children then your life has certainly not been a waste. What is important is to feel good about what you have done. Your self-image and self-esteem need a boost and you alone can achieve that with help from your family. What has happened is that they have taken you for granted as is very common in our culture.

You must slowly make them realize that your life and your time is as important as theirs. Please communicate with them, maybe they do not realize the pain they are causing.

Another important point to remember is, it is never too late to start a career if you have the potential, the will and the determination to do it.

Dear Mita,

What can one do about people who drop in at all odd hours of the day? They do not seem to know or care that their behaviour is creating problems for the host or hostess. It is

WRITE TO MITA

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, Toynebee Circular Road, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000.



TINY TWOSOME: A couple of young dancers presenting a classical number at a function in observance of the second founding anniversary of the Bakul Lalitakala Academy, held in the city recently.

—Star photo.